

## **How the USMAA Family changed the lives of the International Students in Australia**

As Australian Muslims we have historically always been generous in lending a helping hand to our needy brethren in Sri Lanka. However, this was the first time that our fellow Muslims, in our own backyard, had reached out to us for aid. These impacted students were not used to receiving charity. They had stood on their own two feet since coming to Australia, often juggling several part-time jobs while attending Uni. The lockdown dealt them the first blow by closing down many of their workplaces. Their parents, who would normally send them money, had also been adversely affected by the lockdown in Sri Lanka which had restricted their income. This was their second blow. They had no income, no support from parents, rent and other bills kept piling up and they had no money to purchase their day-to-day needs. These students had depleted all their savings, maxed out their credit cards, borrowed from friends and finally as a last resort approached USMAA.

Alhamdulillah, USMAA raised **over \$10,000** from our General Membership, to lend a helping hand to the adversely impacted International students in Australia, as part of our two COVID Assistance initiatives in 2020. Following our email about the young sister who was struggling, the entire Community rallied together and funds started pouring in. Rest assured the money was used to help students who were in dire need.

Below is an update on some of our success stories to showcase how your thoughtfulness has changed people's lives.

### **Student H**

Let's refer to the young Sister who was studying Nursing as Student H. She was our most desperate case and her plea for help was the most heartbreaking. Here is the story that we narrated to you:

She had come to Australia on a part-scholarship and was on her second year studying nursing. Last semester her laptop had crashed and as she did not have money to replace it, she was unable to submit any of her assignments. Unfortunately, this resulted in her failing the semester. Despite not having a laptop, she was compelled to enrol the next semester as well, as her Student visa would have got cancelled if she hadn't. Her dad had paid her uni fee in advance for 2020, but was now struggling to assist her as his source of income in Sri Lanka has been severely constrained. To make matters worse, this young sister, had started experiencing severe pain in the chest and her left arm last month. Tests had revealed that she has an anomaly in her heart and the GP had recommended that she consult a Cardiologist. She did not have money for even a myki card, let alone to pay fees to a Specialist. She has no family or friends in Australia. Her rent was overdue by several months and the family she is renting a room from, is also experiencing financial hardship and hence is not very happy that she can't pay her rent. She has now resorted to working as a domestic help at the landlord's till she finds a way out.

### **UPDATE:**

From the money raised, \$1,240 was specifically requested to be directed to her. In addition, a couple of USMAA members directly credited her account with \$1,500. In addition, one USMAA member offered to purchase her a new laptop as well. USMAA assisted her in drafting a personal statement and completing the application form to seek financial assistance from her University and to get reimbursed the tuition fee for the last Semester which she failed due to non-submission of assignments as she didn't have a laptop. USMAA was also in the process of getting one of the Cardiologists in the Community to take on her case when Allah revealed his plan for her.

Last Friday night, she was made aware of a charter flight leaving to SL on Sunday, 9 August. She had been longing to return to Sri Lanka as she was stressed with her situation and her medical complications. In Sri Lanka, she would have the support of her family and would receive the medical assistance she needed without the same exorbitant costs involved. She had been waiting for a flight since May when she was originally scheduled to leave to SL. Unfortunately, at that time her dad could not mobilise the funds needed

to meet the cost of the ticket and clear her financial commitments in Australia. This forced her to stay in Australia with no safety net. This was the start of her downward spiral. Alhamdulillah, this time the story ended differently. She was able to use the funds donated by USMAA to clear her rent arrears (the landlord graciously accepted a reduced amount) and also use the balance money as emergency funds to be used during her journey and subsequent stay in quarantine for 14 days. Her dad was able to borrow funds from a friend to pay for the ticket. She has confirmed that she has reached SL safely and is now in quarantine. She was genuinely appreciative of the assistance she received from USMAA during her darkest hour. She wanted me to convey to you that she would remember this extraordinary kindness for the rest of her life. Only Allah could have written such a blessed ending to her story. Alhamdulillah.

### **Student A**

We assisted this Student when USMAA collected funds as part of our Tranche one of our COVID Assistance program. He was then in his last Semester of his Masters. He had lost his part-time job due to the lockdown and was struggling. USMAA assisted him with \$1,500. He expressed that he would be forever be grateful to USMAA as our assistance enabled him to complete his degree and he has now secured a job in his field of study.

### **Student B**

We assisted this student with \$550. At that time, he mentioned that this was the first time he was receiving charity in his life. Their family had always been the upper hand when it came to assisting others. Unfortunately, the COVID situation had restricted his dad's income in SL and his own financial position had been impacted when he had lost the 3 part-time jobs he was juggling to pay for his life here in SL. Alhamdullilah, he has now turned a corner and secured a part-time job at Woolworths in the night is generating sufficient cash to meet his rent and his daily expenses. In Shaa Allah he will complete his Masters in a few months.

### **Student C**

We assisted this student with \$550 and VIC Lanka COVID AID (where USMAA is a participating organisation) helped with \$100. When he reached out to us he had lost his part-time job and had exhausted all his savings. Alhamdulillah, he is now standing on his own two feet again. When he lost his part-time job, he had resorted to being an Uber driver but this had not generated enough money due to limited travel caused by the lockdown. He has now found a job at a pizza shop and as at 31 July 2020, he had cleared all his arrears including rent and Uni fees.

### **Student D**

We assisted this student with \$350 and VIC Lanka COVID AID extended \$300. When I spoke to him last week, he was happy to report that he had now found a job at a bakery and had cleared all his rent arrears and moved to a cheaper location in the Western suburbs. He had only one month of Uni fees in arrears but was confident that his part-time job would enable him to save enough to clear this in the near future. These boys are honest and won't seek charity unless as a last resort. He echoed the same sentiments as all the students we have assisted that Allah sent them to USMAA when they had no other avenue to turn to and USMAA provided them with the lifeboat which they needed to weather these stormy waters.

In addition, to financial assistance, we have been able to also provide these students who approached USMAA with food hampers courtesy of ICV who has been giving USMAA 20 hampers every month for the last 3 months.

May Allah shower his blessings in abundance on those who contributed to our fundraising efforts to assist these fellow brothers and sisters at their most vulnerable time.