



## PRIZE WINNER: WINCATE OTIEKA

Wincate Otioka is an amazing young woman. She is the 2023 Keane Consulting Next Gen ICT Prize winner having (almost) completed her Year 12 studies at Lake Tuggeranong College.

It always warms the heart when someone so young provides such inspiration. Wincate was born in Kenya. Her Aunt was selected to travel to New Zealand for a conference to represent Kenyatta University. Soon after, when Wincate was 2 ½, her mother moved to Australia to study nursing and build a better life for her family. Wincate remained in Kenya with her grandparents and sister; seeing her mother every four years when she returned for a visit and whilst waiting for her application to migrate to be approved.

Wincate grew up in a strict and disciplined yet loving household. She was raised by hard working grandparents, both retired teachers. Her grandmother continued to farm on a few plots and her grandfather owned a small a shop. Wincate witnessed her grandmother support the local community in the village where she was raised and attended school before she moved to a public boarding school in year 5. Boarding school was tough. Wincate rose at 4:30am to be in "morning prep" at school from 5am to 6am (study with only a textbook, book and pencil and definitely no talking!). Between 6am and 7am the students then had to fetch water for bathing and or washing clothes, ensuring their dormitory was cleaned and spotless, before breakfast of porridge every day. At 7:30am the school would begin in earnest. The long day continued with lunch and morning tea, afternoon games, reading, prayer, and more study until lights out around 9pm. Dinner and lunch were two alternatives five days a week with Saturday being special (rice and beans) and Sunday's the same as midweek but with the welcome addition of a small piece of beef.

Wincate learned a lot in those years about dedication, focus, and pride in her work and her ability. Her grandmother continued to be her strongest supporter (while her mum was overseas paying for her school fees!); always taking the time to be with her on visiting and open days. At the beginning of Year 7 Wincate finally moving to Canberra in 2007 to be with her family of five. She found her first day of school an absolute culture shock with the noise, kids talking, the teacher trying to attract attention, and the laughing and joking. She also found the High Schoolwork very easy due, in part, to her high intelligence and the study habits she had become accustomed to.

In 2020 things took a turn for the worst for Wincate. Not only did Covid kybosh her family plans to travel back to Kenya, her grandmother was also diagnosed with cancer and died in early 2021. Not too soon after that diagnosis her father was also diagnosed with cancer. He passed away almost 12 months ago to the day. This was a very difficult time for Wincate and her family as the Covid restrictions meant that she was unable to attend her grandmother's funeral. Wincate's studies were severely impacted during this time

Not only did Wincate receive inspiration from her grandmother, who was always Wincate's biggest advocate, telling her she could do anything if she put her mind to it, she also identified with her uncle who was a lawyer in Kenya and talked of his work and travels. Wincate's perpetual inspiration is her mother and what she achieved which did not come easy. With every challenge Wincate's Mum has continued to stay strong and support her family in every possible way. Wincate has realised the world is her oyster and, in support of her upbringing, she has been provided with enormous opportunity and is not going to let that pass. She continues to witness the doubt from people when she tells them she is undertaking study in engineering and, at this stage, intends to work in the civil engineering space. She knows they are thinking "that is not a career for a woman!"; Wincate is not letting that faze her!

Rather than despite her unique upbringing and the death of two very important people in her life, in close succession, but because these experiences, Wincate is very resilient, with a strong character and desire to succeed. She is warm and engaging, funny and entertaining. She epitomises the type of person the Keane Consulting Next Gen prize is designed to encourage, support and enable: young, local women who have overcome challenges in their schooling and are on the cusp of undertaking STEM related study in Canberra.