

Inspirational teenagers

Today's teenagers often get a bad press but they are not all hanging about street corners or sulking in their bedrooms. The ones featured here – like most of the UK's five and a half million teens – are ambitious, talented, and making the most of their lives, often against the odds. Judith Woods and Fiona Holloway report.

Nick D'Aloisio is the founder of the London-based company Summly. He grew up in Perth, Australia. His dad is a banker and his mother is a lawyer. The family moved to London when Nick was 7. At 9 he was given his own computer which he put to use creating movies. At 12 he got an iPhone and began writing apps. He created Facemood, an app that looked at your friend's Facebook timeline and summarised what mood they were in. Nick wanted to summarise more.

'The thing is, I don't have time to click in and out of every story and article on the web that interests me. I want to find a way to skim-read content before reading the complete article. The time is right for this; even Google knows that something needs to be done to make sense of the web overrun by a diarrhoea of words.'

So at just 16 he created Summly, which automatically summarises webpages and news articles. It had 100,000 downloads in its first month and attracted \$250,000 in funding from the Chinese billionaire Li Ka-Shing.

How does Nick reconcile his life as an entrepreneur with his other life as a student and a teenager?



Nick D'Aloisio
17
App
entrepreneur



'I like a load of things. I'm a keen fan of rugby and cricket. I enjoy school and being with my friends, and I work hard at school. I'm learning Russian and Mandarin. I don't want to be seen as a kid who created an app. It's an app which happens to have a kid behind it. Steve Jobs is an idol of mine. He had a clear vision of his product. Like him I'm obsessive about controlling every aspect of my product.'

Nick's ambition to summarise the entire web is still a journey in progress, but the world of technology will be hearing about his exploits for a long time to come. He has recently sold Summly to Yahoo for \$30m.



Jake Bugg grew up on a council estate in Nottingham but he has already achieved a lot. He started playing the guitar at age 12 when his uncle gave him one as a present. By the time he was 14, he was writing his own songs and at 17 he took part in the Glastonbury Festival as one of the BBC Introducing acts.

‘The day before I got the call from the BBC I had been for an audition for another festival and they’d turned me down. The next day the BBC rang and said, “Do you want to play at Glastonbury?” It was just so inspiring and has helped quite a lot.’

Unlike a lot of his school friends, Jake’s musical tastes extend past the Top 40 and latest pop releases. His number one is The Beatles and a lot of older stars such as Donovan, Don McLean and Jimi Hendrix. Like most kids of his age, he browses the web to explore the artists he is into but there are other influences as well.

‘My mum used to play old records around the house. Sometimes the stuff she played was awful but sometimes really alright.’

Jake’s songs have been played on various BBC radio shows and one called Country Song was used in a TV advertisement for beer. Jake himself has appeared on TV in a music programme called ‘Later... with Jools Holland’. He still has a lot of aspirations.

‘Of course I’d like to have a number one hit – everyone wants that but the thing I’d like most is to have a jamming session with Noel Gallagher of Oasis. That’d be so cool. And I guess it would be good to work with one of my heroes, Donovan or someone like that.’

His debut album is due out later this year and will include his new single Lightning Bolt and the song Trouble Town, which is an autobiographical look at life on a council estate.



Jake Bugg
18
Singer and
songwriter



From a young age **Sarah Thomas** from Shrewsbury has been caring for both her parents but primarily for her mum, Carol, 53, who has multiple sclerosis. Sarah has worked hard campaigning for the MS Society and drawing attention to the needs of young carers like herself. At the age of 12, she posted a video on YouTube highlighting the challenges young carers face.

‘I’ll never forget my first day at school. I saw the other children being dropped off by their parents and I suddenly realised that not all mothers were in a wheelchair. The thing is, my mum has had MS for 30 years so I have no memory of her being anything other than ill.’

As an only child, Sarah had to take responsibility for her mother’s condition from a very young age. Although her mum is relatively mobile, she falls over daily, suffers from fatigue and can’t do much. Her father, Ray, used to be the principal carer but he has arthritis now so Sarah helps him too. She joined her local British Red Cross young carers project when she was eight and learned first aid and skills to help her look after her mother.

‘In the mornings I make sure Mum has taken her pills and I give her an injection. After school I cook dinner. I don’t have much time for school friends. When I was eight I developed an eating disorder because I was too stressed to eat. Then someone told me about a Red Cross project that gives young carers the chance to meet each other. That helped a lot. Caring for my mum isn’t a burden; I’m going to carry on doing it as long as it’s necessary.’

Sarah was proud to be chosen to be an Olympic torchbearer in the London 2012 Olympics and she has met the Prime Minister. She is a true inspiration – she’s a hard-working, conscientious student, as well as being a wonderful, caring young lady.



Sarah Thomas
16
The carer

