

Mater Dei Matters



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF MATER DEI, CAMDEN

ISSUE 4 - 2010

Celebrating over 50 years of special education



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A WORD FROM OUR CEO/PRINCIPAL

Welcome to this final edition of *Matters* for 2010. Perhaps it is a measure of how busy life is, certainly at Mater Dei, that this final edition has come around so quickly.

In the October Journal of the Australian Institute on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (Interaction), Richard Bruggemann writes of the struggle faced by many parents of children with intellectual disability against *systems* that relentlessly grind away at their aspirations for their children and steer them towards pre-ordained pathways that better accommodate process than they do people; *“there is the risk that many issues in the lives of people with intellectual disability will be defined more by the professionals than by the individuals and families themselves, and more in terms of services required than around the aspirations of the person.... Unfortunately, over the years, I have met hundreds of families so subjugated by the system that their dreams for their sons and daughters no longer exist and who have been taught to see only the solutions that the system wants them to see”*. Most poignantly, he describes the importance of *hope* as an empowering principle in the lives of families of children with intellectual disability. How true! And what a worthy aspiration for all of us who live and work with the students and families at Mater Dei.

But for everyone, the capacity to dream, to imagine and to hope is important in sustaining us in our daily lives. Joan Chittister O.S.B. puts it this way; *“The dream is everything you can imagine about your own life and then, little by little, set out to make real. A person who does nothing to reimagine his or her own life is a person who has given up on life halfway through it”*. Part of our responsibility at Mater Dei is to do what we can to sustain our community in such a way that we nurture their dreams.

For me, 2010 has been somewhat of a whirlwind experience. There are so many dimensions to life at Mater Dei that it seems impossible to be adequately prepared for the challenges of each. Ironically however, it is the nature of these challenges that is the source of energy for the work. It is impossible not to be captivated by the students, not to be inspired by the parents and staff and not to be overwhelmed by the extent of the generosity of spirit and support from an extraordinarily large group of friends of Mater Dei. This is a blessed community. And while it would be unrealistic to suggest that every day at Mater Dei is a *good* day, it is true, for me at least, that every day at Mater Dei I learn something; about myself, about disability, about community, about priorities and about the presence of God in a very tangible way in

the relationships that permeate our community.

The busy-ness of the year has been thoroughly and adequately captured in this and other editions of *Matters*. My focus and that of our staff remains the future and how best we discharge our obligation to provide the best possible learning opportunities for students across our various programs. We look forward to occupying our new school in 2011, itself a manifestation of the vision of our Board and previous CEO/Principal Frank Pitt, as well as the good will and generosity of so many supporters, all of who will be appropriately acknowledged at an official opening in 2011. I continue to encourage our staff to have high expectations of themselves and of our students and to be innovative and creative in the delivery of their programs. We at least have that responsibility, primarily to our students and their families, but also to the very many friends of Mater Dei who continue to be so generous in their interest and support.

Thank you to all members of our community for all that you have done and invested in Mater Dei throughout 2010. I hope you enjoy the peace of the Christmas season and I look forward to continuing to build our community with you throughout 2011.

Tony Fitzgerald

BAGS A SELLOUT AT FAIR

For the last five weeks of Term 3, the students in the *Living Skills Program* at Richardson House, were, in their spare time, sewing and filling wheat bags to be sold at the recent Mater Dei Country Fair. This was a great opportunity for the students to gain some new skills. For most of the students, it was the first time that they had used a sewing machine!

Well the big day has come and gone. Sales were a huge success and with the help of Mater Dei *Living Skills Program* students Kyle, David, Lauren, Emma, Jackson and Isabella, we are happy to say that all the wheat bags were sold. The students were excellent ambassadors for the *Living Skills Program* and all “Fair goers” were most impressed with how professionally made the \$10 wheat bags were.



A special thank you to the “Saleswoman of the Year”, Mater Dei student, Isabella (pictured second from right), who with a big smile on her face and never ending persistence, sold the most wheat bags on the day!

Mater Dei Annual Charity Golf Day

Monday, April 4, 2011 at Twin Creeks Golf and Country Club, Luddenham

Sponsorship packages available from \$1,950

For further information visit www.materdei.org.au

Farewell the Class of 2010

In December, we farewelled our Year 12 students. Regular readers will know that some of our Year 12 students are members of a Satellite Class located at John Therry Catholic High School Rosemeadow for 3 days a week. They spend the other 2 days with those Year 12 students who are at Mater Dei full time. We asked their Pastoral Teachers to fill us in with what they have been up to this year.



11/12G MATER DEI CLASS MEMBERS



11/12P SATELLITE CLASS MEMBERS



How time flies when you are learning and having fun! This year has passed so quickly - probably because it has been so jammed packed for 11/12G!

The year started with me as their new Pastoral (and Mater Dei) Teacher and I received a fantastic welcome from them! For a short time 11/12G were the teachers and I was the student as they dutifully informed (and corrected!) me about school rules, staff and students! They have applied this eagerness to their learning as well this year and are to be commended for their application in lessons.

Sport was a definite favourite amongst 11/12G this year, in particular dancing and gymnastics! Our visits into the community and participation in the Structured Work Placement Program were also extremely well received. Year 12 students had the opportunity to attend AFFORD at Ingleburn during 2010 and Year 11 students also participated with them in the Meals on Wheels Program. Both opportunities gave students the opportunity to practise their communication skills with others while making a valuable contribution to the community.

There were many significant events, learning opportunities and experiences that I am sure will be fondly remembered – including the “G” Day/Walkathon; our school Swimming Carnival; our school Athletics Carnival held at Magdalene Catholic High School, our Year 11/12 three day Retreat at the beautiful Kiah Ridge Christian Conference Centre and of course, our inaugural St Benedict’s Day celebrations where 11/12G loved interacting with other invited students from our local Catholic High Schools!

Another significant aspect to our busy year was our preparations for our End of Year celebrations – like the Graduation Assembly and Formal. Our whole class also participated in transition visits to our Year 12 classmates’ Post School Program Service Providers where we met up with old friends from Mater Dei and made new ones!

We congratulate Angela Saba who received the prestigious Mater Dei Peace Prize Award, Adrian Dellarmi who received the Good Samaritan Award and Christopher Sciberras who received the Year 12 Student Commitment Award at our recent Graduation Assembly.

Above all, students in 11/12G have made an impressive effort this year to living up to being the senior students at Mater Dei. At all times they tried their best to be role models for the younger students in areas of learning, peace, hospitality and stewardship. **Sam Giles**

The continued belief in the abilities of our students has once again been the foundation on which so much success has been achieved during 2010.

The students have enjoyed a wide range of subject choices including Catholic Studies, English, Mathematics, PDHPE, Technology and Applied Studies, Citizenship and Society, Creative Arts and Work and Community. Highlights of this year have included; participating in the First Aid Certificate, attending the Mount Annan Gym for weekly workouts, digital photography lessons, U-Turn the Wheel and the John Therry Year 12 Retreat. We also enjoyed many wonderful activities with Mrs Fleming in Drama and Dance, producing the play “Brushed Off”, and focussing on Movement and Dance in preparation for this year’s Formal.

We congratulate Stephanie Sciuto for receiving the Mary MacKillop Award at the John Therry Year 12 Presentation Assembly and The Best All Rounder Award at the Mater Dei End of Year Assembly, Elizabeth Cross who debuted in John Therry’s production of GODSPELL - the Musical and received enthusiastic reviews and Kate Feeney who received Mater Dei’s inaugural St Benedict’s Award for Hospitality and the Citizenship Award and Camden Council’s 2010 Mayoral Citizenship Award at the Mater Dei End of Year Assembly. Finally, as we farewell the Satellite Class of 2010, we congratulate them on their outstanding achievements and we wish them every success for the future.

The Mater Dei experience has also been wonderful with highlights including the Year 11/12 Retreat and the opportunity to take part in all the significant celebrations and events at Mater Dei and beyond.

Congratulations to the following students who participated in courses at Campbelltown TAFE this year: Ryan Stibbard who studied Primary Industries/Horticulture, Kate Feeney and Skye Bradbury who studied Retail, Stephanie Sciuto who studied Hospitality/Food & Beverage, Lauren Barrow who attended Hospitality/Accommodation at Kingswood TAFE and Rebecca Rodrigues who attended Beauty Therapy at Liverpool TAFE.

The Structured Work Placement Program was another huge success in 2010 with students all experiencing success in their jobs. Highlights this year include Ryan Stibbard’s appointment to a traineeship at Camden Golf Club and his success in attaining a driver’s licence. **Glynis Patrick**

PEOPLE PROFILE

Lisa Gruar



Payroll Officer etc!

BORN: Fairfield

LIVED: Camden

EDUCATION: Primary at Camden South.
Secondary at Camden High

QUALIFICATIONS: Diploma in Business Studies, Diploma in Health Counselling

WORK HISTORY: I have also worked as a P.A. in marketing, real estate and financial planning

WHAT YOU LIKE: Being creative

WHAT YOU DISLIKE: Procrastination

HOBBIES/INTERESTS: Gardening, flute, patchwork, embroidery and lots of other crafts

HEROES/ROLE MODELS: Jesus

FAVOURITE SONG: I'm Yours, by Jason Mraz, Hallelujah (the other one!)

FAVOURITE MOVIE: Steel Magnolias

READING NOW: Campton, by Ernie Gunders

COUNTRIES TRAVELLED: Hawaii and Australia

WHO WOULD BE THE FIVE PEOPLE YOU WOULD INVITE TO A DINNER PARTY?: Happy to have anyone as long as we go to a restaurant!!

WHY ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH MATER DEI?: I have been with Mater Dei for over 18 years. I love working at Mater Dei and supporting the organisation in many and various ways. I love to think that the work I have done here has made a very real impact and improvement in the support of the all the Programs and staff, which in turn helps to offer much better lives for our precious students.

A week in the life of our Payroll Officer



Each week brings many and varied tasks at Mater Dei and I never have time to be bored. I work 3 days per week, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. When I first arrive at school, I collate all my work for the day/week from various sources and list it all in my diary. I then proceed to work through this list which changes as work comes in and out throughout the week. A lot of people think that sitting in an office is boring. This is so far from the truth at Mater Dei. Believe it or not, the pace is fast and frantic and the role varied and interesting.

My main responsibilities are to receipt fees, bank and balance all money as it comes in, pay our staff each fortnight and ensure all legal requirements around this are fulfilled. I am also the Workers Compensation Officer and Rehabilitation Co-ordinator, so if any staff are hurt or injured it is my role to manage their return to work. This can be very challenging especially when it comes to finding suitable duties in *our* school environment.

My role extends over all the Programs at Mater Dei. I also provide support to the Mater Dei Foundation with record keeping requirements and like to help out if I can when the Development Program is in the throes of an event!

I never know at the beginning of each week how it will unfold, but by the end of Thursday I truly wonder where on earth the week went! I find it amazing that I've been at Mater Dei for over 18 years. It truly feels much, much less! I am proud of my work and find it enjoyable and rewarding. I feel that by doing as good a job as I can, I am helping to make a positive difference to the organisation, the staff, the parents and our students.

In my spare time, I love to retreat to my garden and get back to basics with my hands in the soil. I also love to be creative and indulge in a few crafts, such as patchwork, embroidery, card making and anything else I think I would like at the time. I am also involved in my local church and have had the privilege of being involved in both the design and decoration of our new premises in Narellan. I wouldn't even like to start to consider the number of hours this has consumed over the last six months, suffice it to say, I thoroughly enjoyed the process. I love being involved in service to others and give thanks to God for the many opportunities I have to serve Him in my life.



ADRIANA'S STORY

God sent Adriana to us in 1998 and we knew she was special in every way. At first we were scared because we didn't know what her future would hold for her. Adriana is now 12 years old and I can tell you she has been through so much. I am amazed that she has taught me so much, from her inner strength and courage.

Adriana was born with a rare condition called APERTS syndrome. One child in 160,000 births is born with this condition. This syndrome causes fused cranial sutures, a retruded mid face, fused fingers and fused toes. Adriana also has a moderate intellectual disability and a moderate hearing loss.

Dr Michael Freeland, our Campbelltown based Paediatrician, diagnosed Adriana with this condition at birth. We were in shock and could not believe that this was not picked up at the 18 week ultrasound. Adriana didn't have fingers, she had hooks for hands. Luckily, Dr Freeland was able to direct us to the best Cranio Facial Unit in Australia, Professor David and his team in Adelaide.

Adriana's first 12 months was spent in hospital with oxygen. If she went without oxygen, she would turn blue because of her narrow airways. Adriana's first major operation was at four months old. She had a frontal orbital advancement which gave room for her brain to grow. The doctors also gave her a palatal split to enable her to breathe more easily. Adriana's fingers were separated giving her three fingers and a thumb. Her fingers are still fused and stiff.

Adriana's first year of school was spent at the Royal Deaf and Blind Institute at Glenmore Park. There, the teachers helped her as much as they could.

Adriana started attending Mater Dei's School at five years of age. At first my husband, Joe, and I didn't want Adriana to go to a Special School because that would mean that we had to accept that Adriana was "different", but we soon realized that this was the best thing we have ever done for her.

Adriana loves Mater Dei. She comes home so happy and loves her friends (*pictured with Brenton*) and teachers; and she can't wait to catch her taxi to school in the mornings. The children love one another unconditionally and the love that the members of staff have for all of the children is incredible. Mater Dei

provides individualised programs for each student and also significantly helps their family in every way they can. We feel truly blessed to be part of the Mater Dei family.

Adriana's joints will start to restrict her mobility as she gets older. To date, she has had 29 operations during her short 12 years of life. Adriana will require more operations as she continues to grow. In May this year, Adriana had a major eight hour operation. She had a facial reconstruction. This required relocating our family to Adelaide for two months. Four distractors were placed in her skull and turned daily to bring out her forehead and mid face. Adriana didn't like her new face. She kept saying "I like the other Adriana".

Despite all the operations, the pain, the X-rays and numerous Doctors' appointments, Adriana never sees her condition as a disadvantage. Adriana knows she looks different and hates people staring at her.

Lately, she seems so much more confident. Adriana says she wants to be a doctor one day. She is a fighter and she is always so happy and bubbly. She is also very determined to try and do everything for herself. Adriana just loves life.

Adriana has two older sisters, Stephanie and Olivia, and two younger brothers, Domenic and Tony. We are blessed to be a very loving family and none of us would swap Adriana for the world. Adriana's brothers and sisters love her unconditionally and have said that they will always be there to guide her through life.

Having a child with special needs is not as bad as you initially fear. Sure it changes your plans, and you, but I feel it has made me and my family much better people. At first it didn't come easy, but now I thank God for our sweet angel from above and thank you, Adriana, for all that you have taught me. I love you in every way.... **Josie Gattelari**



Mater Dei PEACE EGGS

On sale from March 30, 2011

Order forms available in 2011.

Visit www.materdei.org.au



The Art of Nurturing - We All Have It!

Sister Fran Nolan sgs and Sister Jeanie Heiningerg sgs (pictured below second and third from right) facilitate the Nurturing Independence group at Mater Dei. Fran and Jeanie worked together at Mater Dei in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Then, it was a boarding school for 40 weeks of the year including weekends and they covered the gamut of nurturing from the students' self care, living skills, interpersonal skills as well as teaching from 9am – 3pm. "We were simultaneously classroom teachers, playmates, counsellors, supervisors of meals and all aspects of personal hygiene, advocates, disciplinarians, spiritual guides, cleaners, conflict mediators and entertainers!" says Fran. Here they write about (and advertise!) the groups that they are conducting at Mater Dei in the 2010s.



We all share in the art of nurturing because we are all human and here at Mater Dei, it is alive and well amongst staff and families. *Conversations for Nurturing Independence* is a program that takes the form of small groups of four or five parents who meet four times in a month. They take place each Term throughout the school year.

Topics covered in our program are human experiences such as negotiating change, strategies to minimize stress, stages of personal growth, grief and loss and the impact of parenting on the whole person. Also our conversations centre on experiences such as the adjustment of family members to the child with additional needs, the experiences of siblings, personal strengths and resilience.

We see the program as an unwavering support of the dreams, hopes and aspirations of parents and during the sessions we remind them of the portrait of competence that is theirs. They represent amazingly talented human beings who have overcome obstacles in their lives and are developing unique techniques of nurturing the independence of their Mater Dei child.

We strive to provide a welcoming and secure environment for our sessions. The last session focuses on their answers to two questions. The first question is, how will I as a parent nurture my Mater Dei child's independence appropriate to their abilities and age? The second question is, how will I nurture my own independence? These conversations are always enjoyable experiences where we all learn without realising it.

Thanks to our Supporters

Mater Dei has received a further \$136,000 in donations since September 2010. Thank you to all for your generous support of our programs and projects.

Major Donations to Mater Dei: \$50,000 from Campbelltown Catholic Club and \$30,000 from the Mater Dei Foundation for the school rebuilding program, \$30,000 from the Mater Dei Foundation for the school Scholarship program, classroom technology and additional therapy hours in the *Early Intervention Program*, \$20,000 from the Mater Dei P&F Country Fair for school programs, \$5,500 from Catholic Development Fund for the school Scholarship program.

Major Donations to the Mater Dei Foundation: \$180,000 from the Estate of Mary Kearney and \$48,036 from the Estate of Jean Locke.

Our Thanks also to: Steve Edge for his recent donation, Quota International Club of Camden, Lions Club of Campbelltown, St Johns Bowling Club and Harrington Estates for their donations to our End of Year Assembly award recipients, Picton Knitting & Crochet Group for their recent donation of knitted toys and Ansavon for its recent donation of Coles vouchers!

And thank you to our all of our Christmas Card customers especially Advanced Metals, Inghams, Insurics, Macarthur Advertiser, Regans Accountants and St Patrick's College Campbelltown for their large orders.

Mater Dei also acknowledges the support of DEEWR – Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in respect of the General Recurrent Grant and Chaplaincy Grant, the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

WINNER of CAR raffle



Pictured above is Helen accepting the keys from Paul Wakeling.

The Mater Dei P&F Car Raffle was drawn on Thursday November 18 and congratulations go to Helen Flett (a Mater Dei receptionist) who is now the proud owner of a new Hyundai Getz!

A big thank you to Paul Wakeling Motor Group for their support of the raffle, to P&F mums, Diane Beears and Tanya Leadbeatter, for coordinating the sale of the raffle tickets and also a thank you to everyone who bought a ticket. Approximately \$6,000 was raised for our students.

You're invited to attend our ladies **Lipstick Luncheon**
Friday, May 13, 2011 from 11am - 2.30pm at The Cube, Campbelltown Catholic Club

Tickets - \$75pp or table of 10 for \$750

Sponsorship packages available from \$2,000. For further information visit www.materdei.org.au

Our new home is almost ready



The end is in sight for Mater Dei's new home. The Hall (pictured) and the School will be finished over the Christmas school holidays, ready for classes in the new year!

The new wing includes 14 classrooms, each 48m² in size, organised over two levels, the third level for Years 7 to 12 and the second level for Years Kinder to Year 6. Each classroom has an adjacent staff office, a 'tutorial' room for calming reflection, and a dedicated store-room. The Primary classes have their own bathrooms and every student will have a locker next to their class entry.

From these classroom levels, there is access via short ramps in a link to all the specialised facilities in the "Orphanage", such as the Library, Science Lab, Cinema, Computer Lab and Dance and Music Studios, already being used by students.

The classroom levels are linked vertically by two very generous, square spiral stairs, which lead directly out to the existing Pool and Playground areas and there is also a new lift connecting these levels.

All the classrooms have a wall of glass with a NNE orientation, which is shaded by a steel mesh frame that doubles as a window cleaning gantry. This aspect will provide a perfect balance of summer shade and Autumn/Winter/Spring solar gain, plus plenty of light.

The building has been designed so that it can be naturally ventilated, but all the rooms have air conditioning for the extremes in Summer and Winter.

The classrooms open out on to a central area on each level, which in turn opens on to a mesh enclosed terrace, for wet day play. The upper central area has a raked ceiling and NNE facing skylights, which will flood the interior with daylight even on the most overcast days.



We farewell the Class of 2010; Lauren Barrow, Skye Bradbury, Adrian Dellarmi, Meghan Fahy, Demi Multari, Kristy-Lee Ogden, Dylan Rae, Angela Saba, Christopher Sciberras, Stephanie Sciuto, Janekan Sridharan and Ryan Stibbard.

SOME NICE FEEDBACK

We received this email from one of our Satellite Class parents recently.

Sorry to bother you on a weekend Glynis but I just wanted to know where the old Kate went? I sent her on camp with you on Wednesday and you sent me back a confident young lady full of motivation with so many new friends I can't count them all. She walked in the door, dropped her bag and said " Mum I have been accepted". I don't know if the students at John Therry Catholic High School realise what an impact they made, but I need you to know just how much it meant, not just to Kate, but to me as well. As a mum of a child with a disability you only dream for that to happen. I thank you and Mater Dei for giving Kate the opportunity to go on camp, she has grown up so much over the last few days. It's unbelievable.

Christine Feeney

I WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT MATER DEI'S CHILDREN!

I wish to make a **tax deductible** donation of \$ _____

I enclose my cheque/money order or

Please charge my: Mastercard Visa AMEX

Expiry ____ / ____ Signature _____

I wish to give ongoing support. Please charge \$ _____ monthly to my credit card above until I advise otherwise.

Please send me more information about:

Becoming a member of the Mater Dei Foundation

Joining Mater Dei's Workplace Giving Program

Becoming a supporter of Mater Dei's Scholarship Program

Remembering the children of Mater Dei in my Will.

Mr/Mrs/Ms/ _____
First Name Surname

Postal Address Postcode

Telephone (Day Time) Telephone (Mobile)

Email

If you would like to make a donation to Mater Dei please complete this coupon and return it to: **Mater Dei PO Box 3090 Narellan NSW 2567**

Thank you!

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Celebrating over 50 years of special education

