

# COMMITTEE PROFILE



*Our regular readers would know of Mater Dei's many programs. All of these programs are steered by committees comprised of very talented volunteers from our local communities. One of these volunteers is Joanne Hewitt who chairs our Bethany Early Intervention Advisory Committee.*

“My association with Mater Dei goes back some twenty seven years, when as a university student I applied for a position as Weekend Social Educator. At the time I was studying Psychology and Special Education and the job enabled me to earn money whilst giving me on the job experience. This was at the time when the Mater Dei Boarding school was closing and there were many students living in the cottages from country NSW who required care and support at

weekends. I have many fond memories of fun times in Teralba Road with a wonderful bunch of students. As my course progressed I took on the full-time role of Senior Social Educator and was subsequently appointed Coordinator of the Community Residential Program (now known as Family Resource and Residential Program).

After leaving Mater Dei in 1989, I went on to enjoy a career that encompassed a variety of Child, Family and Disability settings. In my spare time I also managed to fit in raising four sons with my husband Dennis. For the last five years I have been employed by The Spastic Centre of NSW as Regional Manager, South and West Sydney, where I am responsible for a range of services for children and adults with disabilities and their families. It is in this capacity that I was invited five years ago to join the Bethany Advisory Committee and have subsequently joined the Mater Dei Board of Directors.

Early intervention services play a critical role in developing the skill and confidence of parents to support and encourage the development of their child's foundational life skills. Those early years can be a stressful and daunting time for any young family but it can be particularly confusing when a child is developing at a different pace or in a different pattern to their siblings or peers. The support, practical advice, assistance and tools provided by early intervention practitioners can enable families to ensure that their child gets the best possible start on life's journey. I have been inspired by Bethany's holistic and down to earth approach and the absolute commitment of

its Manager, Vida Carmody, and her staff to the children and the families involved with Bethany and the wonderful outcomes we see for children as they transition from the Bethany program into school.

The NSW Government has outlined a comprehensive vision for the future of Disability Services which will see a significant growth in funding of services over the coming year or two. We are also aware of the very significant population growth anticipated in the local community over the coming years. It is indeed an exciting time to be involved with Bethany as we plan ahead and make strategic decisions about the possibilities for growth and expansion. It is vital to ensure that any new opportunities explored enhance the existing service and are consistent with the mission of Mater Dei of “*Inclusion for all*”.

Of course juggling a family, a very hectic working schedule and a voluntary commitment to Mater Dei can be a challenge however the rewards by far outweigh the disadvantages. The opportunity to be participating in the important ministry of the Good Samaritan Sisters, to be contributing to a dynamic and visionary Board of Directors, but mostly to be a part of the rich and diverse community that is Mater Dei, is an incredible gift. It has been a delightful experience for me becoming “reattached” to Mater Dei after all these years. It's a bit like coming home!”

**Joanne Hewitt**  
*Chair, Bethany Early Intervention Advisory Committee*