



MATER DEI MATTERS

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF MATER DEI, CAMDEN

ISSUE 3 2011

Q&A
WITH SUPPORTER
MARK SCARCE

INCLUSION FOR ALL

FIRST COMMUNION

FOUNDATION DINNERS
RAISE TWO MILLION DOLLARS

A DAY AT THE
RACES

THERAPY PLAYGROUP
BEGINS





A WORD FROM OUR CEO/PRINCIPAL

During Term Three we have welcomed a number of visitors to Mater Dei: fourth year medical students from the University of Western Sydney, colleague Principals from Good Samaritan Colleges in Victoria and Queensland, friends, supporters and generous benefactors of Mater Dei. Each in their own way enriched the life of our school by their visit and by their interest in our work.

Perhaps more significantly, each is themselves enriched by their encounter with our students and our community here. I have yet to meet a visitor to Mater Dei who is not touched in some way, from the simple to the profound, by their experience of being here.

Recently, I attended an inter school basketball carnival in Wollongong for Catholic schools in the Wollongong Diocese. During the day I was approached by a student who identified herself as a Year Ten student from St Mary's Star of the Sea College. This delightful and confident young lady had recognised me from her visit to Mater Dei with other students from St Mary's on the day of our Feast Day celebrations in June. After introducing herself, she went on to say what a great day she had experienced at Mater Dei and that she and her friend had been inspired to return to school and renew their efforts to remain in solidarity with our students and our community at Mater Dei. Similarly, a delightful young lady from Mount Carmel Catholic High School who had been helping with face painting on our Feast Day reported to her teacher on the way back to school that "I am going to work with those children when I leave school".

What an extraordinary gift our students have to impact on the lives of others. And perhaps the gift is simply that; the experience of being with our students. So often in life, we filter our experiences; because of our inclination to be judgemental, our propensity to be self serving and our vulnerability to be captive to the superficial values promoted in advertising and the media.

As Irish theologian Fr Daniel O'Leary writes; "Our experience is pure when we hold no filtering lens, no preconceived notions. You cannot really experience reality with the judgemental mind because you are dividing the moment before you give yourself to it. You are not free to receive". At Mater Dei, our students teach us to live in the present, to value what we have rather than wish for what we have not, to be non judgemental and to be authentically who we are. What you experience at Mater Dei is what is real for the time you are here. That is an extraordinary gift.

The past few months as always have been rich in experiences for our community.

The celebration of the Feast of St Benedict in June was once again a great day for our extended community. Mass was a highlight of the day as we were joined by many Catholic primary and secondary schools from both the Wollongong Diocese and the Good Samaritan network of schools. We were especially grateful for the music provided by the staff and students of St Gregory's College that added another dimension to our Mass. The children sang beautifully. Mass was followed by morning tea and then the presentation of our two St Benedict awards; the award for Community was presented to retired board member John Le Breton and the award for Hospitality was presented to Year Seven student, Victor Fineanganofu.

Our annual athletics carnival was also conducted in beautiful sunshine here at school and with the support of many mums and others who provided a cake stall, it was a great day of fun and friendship. G-Day was similarly a wonderful community day as have been all the other events that are reported on in this issue of Matters.

On a final note, with spring and summer fast approaching, we look forward to finalising landscaping with a view to formally opening our new buildings in Term One 2012.

Best Wishes
Tony Fitzgerald

NEW THERAPY PLAYGROUP



COVER STORY

Our Therapy Playgroup is a haven for parents of very young children with disabilities. "They can share their concerns or exciting experiences and receive friendship and support", says new Occupational Therapist, Amy Watkins. "They can also ask questions of the therapists like they would in an individual session and learn activities to use at home to help their child achieve set goals".

Amy comes to Mater Dei with a Bachelor of Applied Science from Sydney University and is currently completing a Certificate in Special Education (behaviour problems) through Macquarie University. She has completed paediatric practicums in hospital, community and private settings and worked with autism behavioural intervention in a dual role as an Occupational Therapist and Behaviour Therapist.

The children in the playgroup range in age from 11 to 22 months and most have Down syndrome. "It is important to develop social interaction at this early stage. We are using strategies to encourage parallel play, turn-taking and verbal communication. We also foster upper limb movement, strength building, bilateral coordination and reach".

Outside the playgroup, Amy assesses children and determines parental goals before beginning individual intervention at Mater Dei or their preschools or homes. "Simone (Mater Dei's Speech Pathologist) and I have recently commenced joint therapy sessions with some families which is going really well. My passion has always been paediatrics and helping children with disabilities reach their full potential. It is lovely to work in an environment where the strength and determination of the families is so empowering".

Cover photo: Olivia Montgomery, photo by Helen Flett



OLIVIA'S JOURNEY

Vicki Veneran remembers December 1999 very well. “Everyone was obsessed with having a baby in 2000”, she laughs. “People were even taking bets on when and where the first millennium baby would be born”.

One thing was sure - her baby would miss the fan-fare; it was due in February. But on New Year’s Eve Olivia surprised everyone by crowning five and a half weeks early to become the first female of the century born in NSW.

“My husband Sandro and the hospital had to ban the media from the ward. Everyone wanted a photo and an interview”, says Vicki. Olivia ended up in three newspapers including on the cover of the Telegraph and the hospital erected a plaque. “It was the biggest thing of my life, Olivia being born”.

Though Vicki’s baby progressed well she was slow to reach milestones and from the age of two, staged tantrums that no strategy could resolve. It was Camden Cottage Day Care Centre that first suggested a paediatric assessment and so began the journey that brought Olivia to Mater Dei.

Now 12 Olivia has been assessed with a global developmental delay. Her parents also suspect Aspergers. “Our eight year old son Rhys has severe autism and Olivia has characteristics that seem to be a mild version of his”.

Vicki says she and Sandro found it a difficult decision to place Olivia in a special needs school but quickly began to see the benefits. “Mater Dei is like a family and the staff are so caring.

We could see they were getting Olivia to interact with the other children whereas before she could only parallel play”. Olivia’s cognitive skills also started to build.

The breakthrough came when Mr Alan Moore, a former Mater Dei Music and Dance teacher, discovered she had a gift – a beautiful voice. Vicki says he gave Olivia the confidence to sing solo before a school audience of around 600 and developed her love of music to the point where it now boosts her literacy skills. “Olivia sings Karaoke to her favourite songs like Hannah Montana. She looks at the words as the music plays and then recognises them when she sees them elsewhere”.

The Living Skills Program has brought other positive developments. Olivia stays in a Mater Dei house one night a week and has become so independent that she no longer lets her mother unpack the dishwasher, make her lunch or lay out her clothes.

Vicky has herself gained benefit from the Mater Dei experience, forming close friendships with other mothers at the school. “Even though our children are different, we understand each other, can offer advice or just listen if someone has had a bad day”.

Sandro and Vicki dream that Olivia will one day get a job, maybe in a shop or supermarket and continue her singing, dancing and acting because “these opportunities have opened up her world”.

FAITH GETS A SOLID START

Thirteen year old Ethan Campbell said one morning out of the blue "Peace be with you Mum". He was preparing for the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation in the school chapel and the lessons were clearly sinking in.

Seventeen students took part in the Mass conducted by Bishop Peter Ingham and Father Michael Healy on September 2.

"Young people with disabilities need familiarity", says Mater Dei's Religious Education Coordinator, Helen Fahey. "Here they feel at home so the process was more meaningful for them and more relaxed for their families".

Sarah Vassallo's mother Rozana says Sarah might not have accepted the host without the school's preparation. "Sarah has also never been able to sit still in church so as a family, we tend not to go," she says. "She sat so quietly for the mass that we now think we might try again".

Ethan's mother Michelle says he would never have taken the First Eucharist if it were not for Mater Dei. "As a Catholic, it makes me feel better to know Ethan has had this chance".

When the big night came Ethan wore a three piece suit that he had picked out himself.

"How do I look?" he asked everyone including the Bishop. "Very handsome" came the reply.



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www.materdei.org.au**

CONGRATULATIONS KATE & GEORGE

School Captain Kate Feeny and her horse George are an impressive pair.

In early September they placed in the top three for every event in the special needs ring at the Camden High Inter School Equestrian Carnival.

Kate has come a long way since she started riding six years ago to overcome her fear of animals. Kate competes around 15 times a year, regularly outperforming mainstream entrants in the open ring. She can also be counted on to win the "Best Presented".

Kate's mother Christine says she is poised and confident thanks to her riding and her close relationship with George. "As well as her Mater Dei education, of course!"



SUPPORTER Q&A

Mark Scarce is a newly appointed Mater Dei board member and Chair of the Development Program and Race Day Committees.

His involvement with the school started in 1989 when he accepted the first student for work experience at Camden Hire where he is General Manager.

Q *In a crowded charities market, what appeals to you about Mater Dei?*

A There is just something very special about Mater Dei. The kids, the philosophy and outcomes that are achieved for the children and their families are what inspire me to be so involved.

Q *How do you fit us into your busy life?*

A Life is very busy but it's surprising what you can fit in when you have a passion for something!

Q *You employ two Mater Dei graduates. What do they bring to Camden Hire?*

A They bring many things to our workplace. These include inspiration, dedication and an overwhelming desire to please. We have given these guys an opportunity and they have grabbed it with both hands and are doing an absolutely fantastic job!

Q *Do they have positive traits that could be attributed to Mater Dei?*

A Without Mater Dei both Glenn and Tom wouldn't be where they are today. They have been taught life skills, literacy, numeracy and all with an underlying Christian faith.

Q *Why is disability a cause close to your heart?*

A I think my passion has grown initially from the work placement program and seeing what these people can achieve when given an opportunity.



Q *What is your favourite movie and why?*

A The Bourne Identity series. Plenty of action!!

Q *If you could invite any five people to dinner, who would they be?*

A Angelina Jolie, Lance Armstrong, Cadel Evans, Mick Doohan and Chad Reed.

Q *If you could choose to be any super hero, who would it be and why?*

A Superman. I think it would be great to be faster than a speeding bullet!

TWO BLUES PARTNER DINNER

The inaugural "2 Blues Dinner" was held in Mater Dei's new hall on August 18. Organised by members of Mater Dei's Development Program Committee, guests were invited to attend the event to learn more about the Living Skills Program and meet the students and families who benefit from it.

During his presentation Tony Fitzgerald noted that due to financial pressures, many families could not enrol their child in the Program or extend their attendance to an additional night. "This program provides the student with the opportunity to practice and learn skills that will enhance their independence".

Zoe, a student in the program, spoke proudly about all the things she has learned, including cooking skills.

Mater Dei mum Trish Hedges spoke of how her 17 year old son, Lachlan, performed chores at home he learned in the program. "He loves to hang out and fold the washing. Tell me how many 17 year olds you can say that about!"

Guests were invited to consider becoming a 2 Blues Partner for the Living Skills Program. A pledge of \$2,000 a year over two years enables a Mater Dei student to participate for one night a week for two years. In return, the supporter is

partnered with a student and will receive six monthly reports on the student's progress.

Pieter and Colleen Versluis who signed up as Partners said, "This is a program which deserves support and if our small contribution helps a child get the full benefit of two nights in the program, then in our opinion, that is money well spent".

If you would like to become a 2 Blues Partner, please contact Debbie Gates on 4655 7481.



BETTING ON A GOOD CAUSE



You can't beat the Mater Dei Race Day at Kembla Grange for laid back good fun. This year's event was held on July 30 and guests quickly bonded as they traded tips and placed bets. "It is a fast paced, highly charged atmosphere with a ton of laughs" said Committee member Tony Sanderson from CDF Wollongong.

Favourites dominated the eight-race program and made for many happy punters among the Mater Dei crowd. "The day lends itself to fun but it is also an inspiring and emotional time," said MC, John Walsh. "I never cease to be amazed at the dedication of Mater Dei staff and the generosity of the Macarthur and Illawarra Districts".

Unlucky punters had the chance to win \$50 in the losing ticket draw and an auction of the service of a brood mare by a quality stallion raised \$5,000. The main sponsors were the Campbelltown Catholic Club and Ingleburn RSL Club. Overall \$22,000 was raised for the Mater Dei Community Access Program.

THANK YOU

A big thank you to our sponsors, supporters and all who attended the day.

Main Sponsor

Campbelltown Catholic Club

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Committee

Mark Scarce (chair), John Gamble, Paul Hillbrick, David Marsh, Tony Sanderson, John Walsh, Debbie Gates.

Donations and donations in kind

Beauty by Danielle Wollongong, Blooms the Chemist Camden, Bussoletti Lawyers, Camden Hire, Catholic Development Fund Wollongong, Catholic Education Office, Domayne Electrical Warrawang, Gemelle Italian Restaurant Liverpool, Hawkesbury Race Club, Illawarra Turf Club Kembla Grange, Jeff Grimish, Lorenzo's Diner, Marie Young, Mary Mackinnon, NAB, Narelle Erisir, Neris Taylor, Novotel Wollongong, Office Smart Narellan, Olives Restaurant Camden, Partners in Vision Albion Park, Phil Stephens.

SENIORS BOND ON RETREAT

When Jackie Adam got off the bus after the Seniors' Retreat she looked exhausted, but very happy. At camp she had found the courage to not only climb on stage but dance the can-can with her friend Laura in front of her teachers and peers. In the previous seven years Jackie had refused staunchly to do anything that attracted attention. "She was smiling the whole time. It was a stand-out moment", said Secondary Coordinator, Alison Meani. "Tony Fitzgerald couldn't believe his eyes - he had to get out his camera and film it".

Breakthroughs like Jackie's are just what staff were hoping for. Retreat activities encouraged students to think rather than follow, to learn responsibility, connect with one another and to embrace the Benedictine tradition. In one exercise students were invited to morning tea. Some were given water and dry crackers, others juice boxes and a plastic tablecloth while the third group had a gold covered table weighed down with treats. "The students at the wealthy table didn't feel right about having more than students who didn't deserve less. Without being asked, they took food to the other tables". A discussion about injustice and the plight of refugees ensued.

The students also prepared their own liturgy, meditated, played sport, went bushwalking and spotted kangaroos. "I am one of those people who like everything", said Kate Feeney when she arrived home. "But I had a really nice time. Everyone got on well and we now feel closer than before".



FOUNDATION DINNERS RAISE TWO MILLION DOLLARS



Mater Dei Foundation Dinners have hit the \$2 million mark after this year's event made \$250,000 on Saturday September 9.

"The Mater Dei community is well known for its generosity. Once again, led by Platinum Sponsor Inghams Enterprises and other significant and ongoing supporters they have shown this", said Development Manager, Debbie Gates.

Members of the organising committee also dug deep. At night's end they realised that they were \$19,000 short of \$2 million and put their hands in their pockets to help make up the difference.

"I know these wonderful people don't expect anything in return for their

generosity, but the parents and guardians of children at Mater Dei would like to express their sincere thanks, not only for their ongoing support, but also for the special love they have for our children", said Garry Saunders, Chairman of the P&F.

On stage students proved the money is well spent with a reality TV send-up of "Dancing with the Staff". They were more at ease than their nervous teachers and rumba'd, waltzed and hip-hopped before performing a rendition of "We Go Together" from the musical "Grease". The Mater Dei choir opened the event and sang two ballads, "The Climb" and "Just the Way You Are" with energy, confidence and lots of waves at the end.

The official entertainer was the crooner with movie star appeal, Tom Burlinson, who performed hits from Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole under the glow of crystal chandeliers at The Cube, Campbelltown.

League legend, Steve Edge and local solicitor, Jim Marsden are the "Two Ronnies" of the auction business. With a lot of laughter they helped items like four private dinners fetch \$20,000, while the student painting "Dancing Trees" went for \$5,000.

A moving speech by parent Gina Walsh reminded the 600 in attendance of what the event was for. So did the numerous ex-students in the audience, some of whom got up to take a bow as Committee Chair, Phil McCarroll, spoke of what they have achieved.

SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

We acknowledge and thank the following businesses and individuals for their wonderful support of this event:

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Inghams Enterprises

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Committee
Phil McCarroll (Chair), John Adam, Martin Cascarino, Angus Cox, Jim Marsden, Kevin O'Keefe, Tony Fitzgerald, Debbie Gates

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Terrey Hills Golf Club, The Argyle Inn, The Production House, Tony Wolf & Son Quality Printers, Trattoria La Vigna Restaurant, Tulch Family Communities, Twin Creeks Golf Club, Vital Peripherals Supplies, Wests Campbelltown, Wests Tigers

Volunteers
Donna & Grant Butterfield, Lisa and Jake Gruar, Michelle Krikowa, Nicole Perriman, Susan Smart

MATER DEI STUDENT PERFORMERS AND REPRESENTATIVES

Mitchell Anthony, Julia Aslan, Joel Beers, Ethan Campbell, Ebony Capitani, Mischa Castaneda-Abalos, Thomas Crichton, Elizabeth Cross, Zoe Dengate, Jade Di Girolamo, Lily Dobson, Emma-Jane Duggan, Kate Feeney, Victor Fineanganofa, Reilly Galway, Oliver Gooden, Laura Gow, Joseph Gurnett-Attard, Rachelle Hadchiti, Stephanie Hamid, Emma Harrison, Jareer Jaber, Olivia Leadbeater Nathan Leich, Stephan Males, Joseph Marando, Candice Marsh, Clare Marsh, Amie McClymont, Paige McCue-Shore, Andrea Moretto, Jake Nelson, Isabella Nolan, Linda Obeido, Taylah Palmer, Thomas Perrin, Genevieve Ryan, Phoebe Said, Ella Schaefer, Aaron Seeney, Beth Simpson, James Slender, Rebecca Sutton, James Tabone, Sarah Vassallo, Olivia Veneron and Johnny Zarzour

We also acknowledge and thank all the Mater Dei staff and parents and the wonderful staff at The Cube for their support.

Mater Dei COUNTRY FAIR & EX STUDENT REUNION



Sunday October 16, 2011

Come along and join the fun
from 9am-3pm

229 Macquarie Grove Rd, Camden

THANK YOU SUPPORTERS

In addition to the funds raised from our Race Day and Dinner we have received nearly \$120,000 in donations since June 2011. Thank you to all for your generous support of our programs and projects.

Major Donations

\$75,000 from the Campbelltown Catholic Club for School programs and school building project

\$25,000 from the Archdiocese of Sydney for School programs

\$10,000 from the Wales Family Foundation for School programs

\$5,000 from the Campbelltown Catholic Club for resources for the Living Skills Program

\$2,000 from Pieter and Colleen Versluis for the 2 Blues Partner Living Skills Scholarship Program

\$1,000 from David Everett for the 2 Blues Partner Living Skills Scholarship Program

Our Thanks also to:

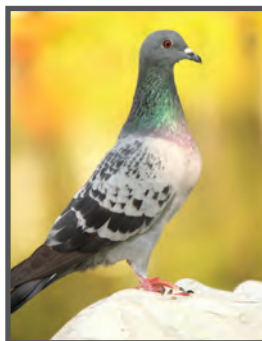
St Mary's Star of the Sea Wollongong, Neris Taylor, the Macarthur Singers and Noel and Joan Watson for their recent donations.

Mater Dei gratefully acknowledges The Mater Dei Foundation for recently honouring its pledge of \$575,000 towards its building program.

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

Newsletter Supporters

A special thanks to the people who have helped to get this edition of Mater Dei Matters completed, including Christina Barriere (editor), Jenny Bartholomew (graphic designer), Tony Wolf & Son Quality Printers and everyone who contributed stories and photographs.



The Mater Dei GREAT PIGEON RACE

Sunday October 16, 2011

Great prizes to be won!

Sponsor a team for only \$250

visit www.materdei.org.au

More photos of the Mater Dei events featured in this newsletter are available for viewing on our website: www.materdei.org.au

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