

Partners in Medical Research

The Community Paediatric Program is a partnership with Mater Dei and the University of Western Sydney Medical School. Here two of "our" recent 4th year medical students write about their time at Mater Dei.....

What is the Community Paediatric Program?

The program provides a wonderful learning opportunity for the medical students and an opportunity for the UWS Medical School to engage with the Greater Western Sydney community. With this, comes a steep learning curve as many of us have had very little experience caring for children with special needs. A misunderstanding of these needs, from both doctors and the community, has stood in the way of the children achieving their full potential. The aim of this partnership is hopefully to provide Greater Western Sydney with a new generation of doctors who are better equipped to care for these very special children.

What were your first impressions of Mater Dei?

We arrived at Mater Dei to find a school,

much the same as any other school, with kids playing and gossiping before the start of their day of classes. Still, we were unsure of ourselves and of our surroundings. Were there unwritten rules we needed to follow? Would the kids accept us? As it would turn out, it was the children that showed us the way. They accepted us without any reservations, allowing us to see all the barriers we had put up were in our own heads, a product of our own misconceptions. This, then, was the beginning of our education at Mater Dei.

What have you learnt about working with children with special needs?

The short time we've had here has allowed us to begin to appreciate and understand what it means to care for a child with special needs. So much of this care is a product of the specialised skills that are so familiar to the parents and teachers of the children at Mater Dei. Fortunately for us, these have been just the people who have so generously taken the time to provide us with a unique insight that could come only from experience. Every child is different. We've learnt from the time we've



spent together, in the playground and in the classroom, with each and every one of them. Every day at Mater Dei brings its own surprises and challenges, which themselves have presented a unique opportunity to learn and gain from the experience.

Thank you to parents, teachers and staff especially Assistant Principal, Pamela Templeton, for all that you have taught us and the beautiful children of Mater Dei who, with their charming smiles and winning ways, have opened our eyes.

Matt and Aarani