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Catholic Education Sandhurst



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Issue 15

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From the Director...

COMMUNITY A PRIORITY FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



Catholic Education Sandhurst is very much a community, and has at its heart the people which comprise it. The dictionary tells us that the word 'community' is derived from the Latin *communitas* (meaning the same), which is in turn derived from *communis*, which means "common, public, shared by all or many". *Communis* comes from a combination of the Latin prefix *con-* (which means "together") and the word *munis* (which has to do with performing services).

In the nineteen decades this Diocese has served the educational needs of Catholic families, we have developed a very strong and lively sense of community. Parents have always chosen a Catholic education for their children for many varied reasons. Each child or young adult who comes to us is valued and respected for the gift that they are, for the talents each possesses, for the unknown possibilities each has within them. It is the educators' duty and great privilege to draw forth these possibilities.

Today, across Sandhurst Diocese (and beyond!) many thousands of adults are contributing positively to their communities as a result of the solid education they gained, provided to them by strong, deeply committed educators. Religious men and women, together with lay teachers and support staff in our schools, have ensured that the quality of the Catholic education available was something that would remain with the individual for the remainder of his or her life. It has always been stressed that each of us who benefited from a Catholic education then had a responsibility to contribute to the community. This overt sense of community and all that carries with it, helps make the Catholic school a special place.

A community is alive and healthy when its members take pride in its achievements, contribute to its wellbeing, and enliven its spirit. As we enter an uncertain educational future, we do with the same quiet determination and deep commitment as those who have gone before us and made Catholic education the great treasure for Sandhurst that it is. We look with gratitude to our past and great confidence in our future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Paul Desmond'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'P'.

Mr Paul Desmond
Director of Catholic Education Sandhurst



Catholic Schools Child Safe Schools

CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety

A safe and nurturing culture for all children and young people in Catholic schools

The Statement is intended to provide the central focus for child safety¹ across Catholic education in Victoria, built around a unified understanding of the moral imperative and overarching commitments that underpin our drive for improvement and cultural change.

The Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons. 'The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: that is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school'.

(Congregation for Catholic education 1997, par. 9)

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of Catholic education. This commitment is drawn from and inherent to the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the Gospel.

The CECV has a universal expectation for the protection of children. It is resolutely committed to ensuring that all those engaged in Catholic education in Victoria promote the inherent dignity of children and young people and their fundamental right to be respected and nurtured in a safe school environment. This is particularly so for the most vulnerable children, including aboriginal children, from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with a disability.

Catholic schools have a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and where they are safe and feel safe. When allegations of abuse concerning children and young people are raised, Catholic schools will take prompt action to have these appropriately referred and investigated. While the context and reality at each Catholic school will differ, the fundamental issues of understanding effective practices in child safety and identifying and responding to child harm remain the same. All schools must strive for continual improvement that is responsive to emerging thinking, evidence and practice, so as to eliminate the possibility of abuse occurring in the first place.

Creating child-safe school environments is a dynamic process that involves active participation and responsibility by schools, families and their communities. It is marked by collaboration, vigilance and proactive approaches across policies, procedures, curriculum and practices.

Every person involved in Catholic education has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

¹As defined by the Victorian Government Special Gazette No. 2 (2016), 'children and young people' in this document refers to those children and young people enrolled as students in Catholic schools in Victoria.

The CECV commits to providing **a safe and nurturing culture** for all children and young people in Victorian Catholic schools through:

1 Upholding the primacy of the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

At all times, the ongoing safety and wellbeing of all children and young people will be the primary focus of care and decision-making, with particular attention paid to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of children with a disability.

To create and maintain a safe and nurturing culture, schools will actively and continually develop and review all policies, processes and practices, informed by emerging thinking and evidence.

2 Empowering families, children, young people and staff to have a voice and raise concerns.

Schools, in partnership with families, will ensure children and young people, are engaged and active participants in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on their safety.

This means that the views of staff, children, young people and families are taken seriously and their concerns are addressed in a just and timely manner. Children and young people are also provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.

3 Implementing rigorous risk-management and employment practices.

Schools will systematically and continually identify and assess risks to child safety and will eliminate (where possible) or reduce all potential sources of harm. Effective risk management will be embedded in school life through effective, transparent and well-understood policies, procedures and practices.

Schools will employ highly competent and professional staff who are formed and challenged to maintain the safety of all students. The high-quality of staff appointments will be upheld through rigorous employment and staff review processes and practices.

Catholic education will stay abreast of current legislation and will meet their legislative duties to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in their care, including the Victorian Child Safe Standards (Victorian Government 2016), mandatory reporting, grooming, failure to disclose and failure to protect requirements.

References

Congregation for Catholic education 1997, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Vatican, Vatican City, accessed 24 February 2016 www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_27041998_school2000_en.html.

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FABULOUS FABLICE!

Fablice Manirakiza is a young man on a mission. The former child soldier is changing hearts and minds one person at a time as he shares his remarkable story of courage and resilience.



I first met Fablice in church, Sacred Heart Cathedral to be exact. We had been communicating for some time through his agent and by email, but this was the first time we had met face-to-face.

Quietly spoken, Fablice Manirakiza is making a name for himself in the Australian music scene as a rap artist and an inspirational speaker, but how did a former child soldier come to be in Bendigo at a conference for leaders in Catholic Education?

I had been asked to engage a guest speaker for the conference when a colleague mentioned that she had read an article about Fablice I decided to investigate further. I must admit I was a little hesitant to start with as I wasn't sure if he would be the right fit for the leadership conference. I wondered how the audience would respond to a young person who made his living primarily as a rap artist under the performance name 'Flybz'. The newspaper article about Fablice mentioned that he had a TED talk on YouTube, and after watching it, I knew that he would be the perfect choice.

Hailing from war-torn Burundi in Africa, Fablice Manirakiza has a remarkable story to tell and, like most rap artists, is a storyteller who knows how to engage with the audience; by the end of his presentation he had everyone on their feet, dancing and singing along.

Here is Fablice's story:

Born into one of the poorest countries in the world, Fablice hails from Burundi in Central Africa, a country ravaged by civil war. In 1993 Fablice and his family fled Burundi and became refugees in Rwanda. After a couple of months, they were told to leave Rwanda as well and were forced to return to Burundi where they had no option but to start again.

When Fablice was eight, both of his parents were killed in a tribal war. His mum was Hutu and his dad was Tutsi so he was trapped in the middle of two tribes intent on destroying each other.

At the age of 11 he was taken from his classroom and forced to become a child soldier; the soldiers asked all the tall boys to stand up and they took them away. Luckily, after two weeks, Fablice managed to escape but lived in fear because he knew they were looking for him.

Smuggled across the border by his siblings, Fablice crossed a river during the night to join a sister who had been living in a Tanzanian refugee camp for ten years. Fablice would remain at the refugee camp for a further three years before immigrating to Australia at the age of 14.

In Australia, Fablice was given the opportunity to gain an education, and most importantly, a safe place to grow and learn. After studying for his VCE in 2011, Fablice studied International Business at RMIT University and on completion secured a job at Multicultural Arts Victoria as a youth officer.

Fablice had a love of music his entire life but there had been no opportunity to be a musician growing up in Burundi. He remembers making drums out of whatever materials he could find as a child but it was only in Australia that Fablice was

At the age of eight, both
of Fablice's parents were
killed in the tribal war... he
was trapped in the middle
of two tribes intent on
destroying each other.

able to develop his love of performing. Now a rap icon among Australian youth, he has performed at concerts and festivals across Australia, East Timor and Africa.

Fablice is a Catholic with a strong faith who speaks openly about his relationship with God and the values instilled in him by his parents. In recent years Fablice has visited schools for Jesuit Social Services with mentor, Paul Stewart from Painters and Dockers, sharing his experiences through rap music to help young Australians learn what life is like in a third-world country.

In 2013 he released his debut single Child Soldier, a collaboration with legendary Australian songwriter Paul Kelly, and his debut album; Just Passing Through in 2012.

Fablice has served as President of the Australian Burundian Community in Victoria since 2013. As a proud ambassador for his community and his people, Fablice toured East Timor in 2015 to spread his message of hope to communities throughout the country.

For five years Fablice was an Ambassador of Action Aid and Love of Language. He was the Recipient of Multicultural Arts Victoria's (MAV) inaugural Arts and Cultural Development Scholarship for Refugee Youth; host of 'I Love Africa Day' and 'Black Harmony Day'.

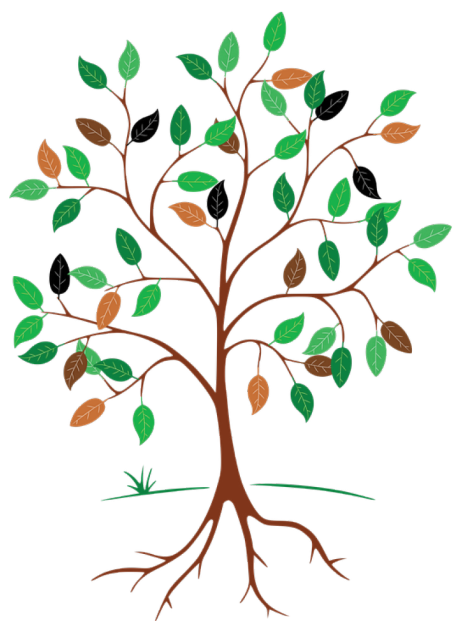
Last year Fablice was awarded a Victorian Young Achiever Award and the first-ever Refugee Scholarship Award from Multicultural Arts Victoria, where he has organised a number of youth arts festivals around Victoria.

Fablice Manirakiza is a man of substance, a storyteller and an advocate for refugees and human rights. This young man is changing minds, one person at a time, and gaining a legion of fans along the way.

For more information about Fablice you can visit his website at www.flybzempire.com and bookings can be made at fablicebookings@gmail.com

PRINCIPAL WELLBEING PROJECT

Catholic Education Sandhurst



The Director of Catholic Education Sandhurst Paul Desmond initiated the Principal Wellbeing Project as a major priority for 2017 – 2018 in response to the National Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey Report conducted by Philip Riley, PhD Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, Principal Researcher, Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey, Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Faculty of Education and Arts, Australian Catholic University.

Being curious about what is going on for our leaders within a system of schools has been the starting point for the Principal Wellbeing Project. The “cycle of inquiry” a change process for improvement through the work of Professor Helen Timperley from Auckland University New Zealand is underpinning this project. Curiosity is a driver for change when conditions are created where being inquisitive is encouraged, developed and sustained leading to an openness to thinking, changing practice and creating dramatically more innovative approaches to a particular area of focus.

Being curious about “*What is going on for Principals?*” has been the impetus for the gathering of data through the following processes:

- *National Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey* completed by Principals and Deputy Principals 21 February – 2 March.
- *Listening Tour* with face to face conversations with all Principals, 6 February – 28 March.
- Development of a profile of Workforce Data, March 2017.

On 20 April, Professor Philip Riley presented the Sandhurst Diocese Principal Occupational Health and Safety Report to Principals, Deputy Principals and the CEO Leadership Team. The report, which highlighted many strengths and challenges for our Principals, is informing the basis for further analysis and decision making as we move into the strategic development of the Project.

Identified key strengths include:

- High job satisfaction
- Confidence in ability to lead
- Cognitive competence
- Commitment to the role and school community
- Commitment to development of relationships



Philip Riley, a former school principal, spent 16 years in schools before moving to the tertiary sector. He researches the overlapping space of psychology, education and leadership, producing more than 200 publications and peer reviewed conference presentations. He has been awarded \$8 million in research funding including 3 prestigious Australian Research Council (ARC) Grants. In 2010 Philip's research was recognised with an inaugural Monash Researcher Accelerator award. This award funded the first two years of The Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey, the first independent research project into principals' occupational health and wellbeing. He has since won the Dean's award for Excellence by an Early Career Researcher, and the award for Excellence in Innovation and External Collaboration, at Monash in 2011. In 2015, Philip won the International Study Association of Teachers and Teaching Award for Most Outstanding Article of 2014. He has presented 7 international Keynote addresses (Germany, Canada, Belgium, Ireland, France) and 69 local Keynote addresses to industry groups in all states and territories. The Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey is now conducted in Australia, Ireland and New Zealand.

Identified key challenges include:

- Normalisation of sleeplessness/work hours/ quantity of work
- Burn out/stress levels
- High emotional demands
- Dealing with offensive behaviour
- Work life/family life balance

A Diocesan Principal Wellbeing Project Reference Team, comprising of Primary and Secondary Principals, Deputy Principals and CEO Leadership Team members, has been established to oversee the development of a strategic plan in response to the data. This will be inclusive of short-term and long-term actions with a clear aim to improve the health and wellbeing of our school leaders.

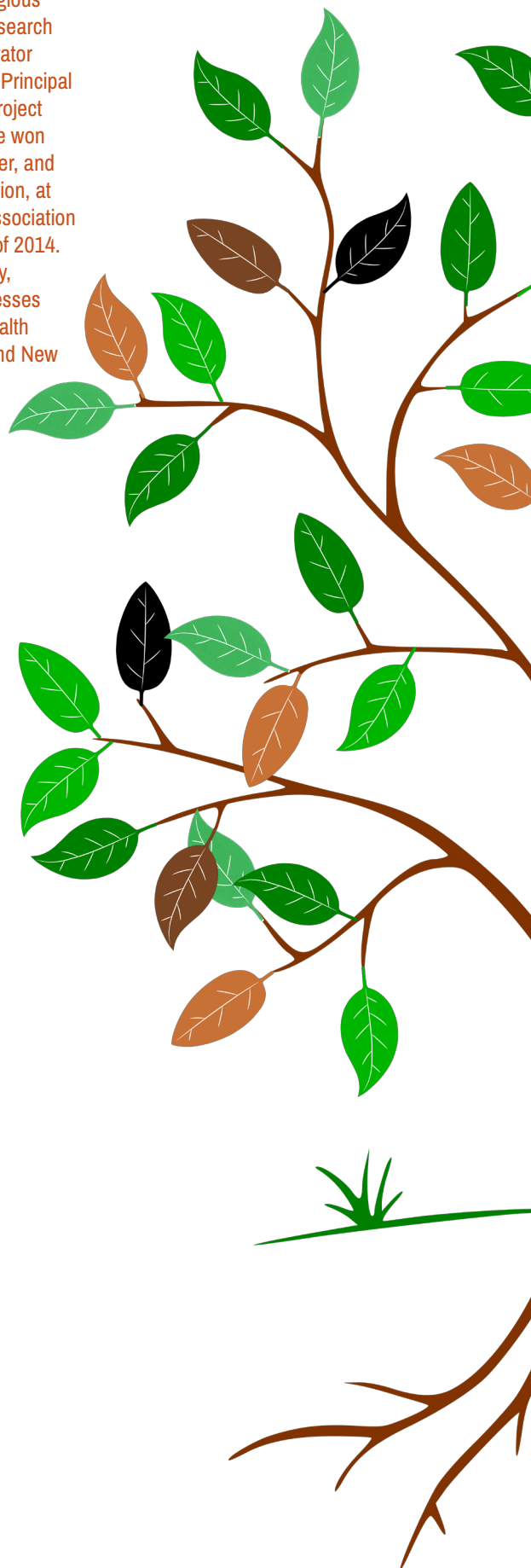
The workforce data presented a collective profile of our Principals and Deputy Principals. This was related to details such as age, gender, years of experience as Principals, school context, qualifications, leave, role and profile of Deputy Principal, Portfolio of Deputy Principal and aspirations of Deputy Principal.

Further keypoints identified in the workforce data for investigation include the development of:

- Systemic recruitment strategy for Principals inclusive of identification of potential leaders.
- Strategy to support and promote Women in Leadership
- A Leadership Framework inclusive of formation and development related to pathways support of career stage

The Principal Wellbeing Project is symbolised by the Olive Tree, which is seen as a metaphor for flourishing. The Olive Tree has strong links to the Old Testament so has an immediate connection to our Catholic tradition and story. It is also connected to many ancient cultures and, in the agricultural sense, when the Olive Tree is looked after, nourished and supported with the right conditions it grows to have a long and sustainable life. The Principal Wellbeing Project is aiming to ensure that our Principals are well (in every regard), that they are valued and supported so that they can effectively lead school communities for our young people.

Julie Cobbledick - Consultant: Principal Wellbeing Project



LOOKING THROUGH THE LENS



It's been four years since Catholic Education Sandhurst has filmed a new television commercial and it was time for a new campaign, so with film crew, producer and some very enthusiastic children, we took to the road to capture the essence of Catholic Education in the Sandhurst Diocese.

The two previous commercials were each accompanied by a voice-over, but this commercial was going to be different; no words appearing on the screen, no students or teachers talking to camera and no voice-over. Instead, an upbeat music soundtrack with inspirational lyrics was chosen to capture the attention of the audience and to help convey the wonderful aspects of life in a Catholic school community.

The greatest challenge was selecting a soundtrack with a lyric which enabled the commercial to bring the elements of Catholic Education to life. After much searching an upbeat pop track called, *'Hold on to this moment'* was selected and filming began.

The small town of Rochester, in Central Victoria, was the first location for filming as the journey across the diocese commenced. From Bendigo, Rochester and Wangaratta, filming also took place in Myrtleford and Chiltern over three days, eight schools and countless kilometres.

The final result is a fast-paced commercial which endeavours to represent an educational system which continues to grow in quality and public regard. It is, however, a snapshot of some of the key elements of Catholic Education as you can only touch on the main themes in such a short time.

The greatest promotion of any school still comes from the endorsement of families who are already in Catholic schools; it is the word-of-mouth approval from these families that fully showcases the Catholic School difference throughout Australia.

It is hoped that the new television commercial will instil a sense of pride in the current Catholic education community and promote some of the key elements of Catholic education to prospective parents in the Sandhurst Diocese. The new television commercial was aired this year in May as part of a promotion for Catholic Education Week 2017 and will appear for up to four years.

1



St Joseph's Rochester

St Joseph's has a delightful school Chapel which was used as a key location for the commercial; the opening and closing scenes were filmed at St Joseph's, depicting faith in Sandhurst Catholic schools.

2



St Peter's North Bendigo

It's always challenging to film outdoors, but the students at St Peter's were enthusiastic as they were asked to run up an embankment on the edge of the school oval. There were some tired legs in the end but the footage was wonderful.

3



St Monica's Kangaroo Flat

Two scenes were filmed at St Monica's Primary School to complete the first day of filming, one in the junior section where we featured students playing outdoors, and a Maths scene using older students.

4



Galen Catholic College Wangaratta

Social justice and sport were the two scenes captured at Galen Catholic College. Two students who are accomplished high jumpers were incredible as they jumped over and over again until we got the 'right' shot. A Caritas fundraiser at recess was the focus for the second scene.

5



Our Lady's Wangaratta

There was much excitement at Our Lady's as we captured a classroom scene of a student receiving a certificate for excellent work. Celebrating achievements, large and small is a wonderful aspect of Catholic education.

6



Marian College Myrtleford

Two scenes were filmed at Marian College where the first scene captured senior students standing at the school lectern speaking at an assembly. The second scene featured a dance arrangement where students showcased The Arts.

7



St Mary's Myrtleford

St Mary's students were magically transported from the theatre, where they were the audience for The Arts scene, to the classroom for the technology scene! A green screen enabled the editors to bring the technical components of this scene together.

8



St Joseph's Chiltern

Showcasing the commitment to sustainability in Sandhurst schools was an important inclusion for the commercial. St Joseph's in Chiltern has a wonderful vegetable garden which was the perfect location for this scene.



From 15-29 March, 2017
Catholic Education Sandhurst proudly hosted the **Courage to Care** exhibition
in Bendigo.

The **Courage to Care** Exhibition is presented through four themes:

This positive and inspiring exhibition is an initiative of *B'nai B'rith International*; "*Children of the Covenant*", is the oldest Jewish service organisation in the world. The exhibition reinforces that even the smallest caring action can bring extraordinary results.

The exhibition addresses contemporary issues of discrimination, prejudice and bullying by demonstrating the power of the individual to make a difference if he or she is willing to stand up and take action to help someone in need. The effects of even the smallest action can be extraordinary in its results.

Using World War II and the Holocaust as an example, the exhibition demonstrates the impact of discrimination through personal stories, encouraging understanding and empathy for minority groups and for people experiencing disadvantage.

By highlighting and honouring the courage of ordinary men and women who, even in the face of great personal risk, took action to help others in the past, the exhibition challenges visitors to critically reflect on their personal values today. Through its positive message, the exhibition inspires and empowers viewers to not be bystanders, but to take positive action when they witness injustice in their everyday lives.

Discrimination

The first theme outlines the ways in which discriminatory Nazi policies were introduced, and shows how they restricted the lives of people first in Germany, then in the occupied countries. It demonstrates how discrimination can become institutionalised, impacting on every aspect of the victims' lives.

Historical objects, such as the infamous yellow stars and other personal memorabilia, are powerful examples to visitors of the ways in which propaganda and discrimination directly touches and undermines the lives of victims. Visitors are challenged to consider - does this still happen today and how?

Intimidation

The second theme focuses on the experience of the individual. It illustrates what it is like to be rendered powerless and demonstrates how victims felt and responded as a direct result of intolerance and intimidation. Fear caused people to assume false identities or to go into hiding, or to be on the run for years and always in search of a secure hiding place.

The stories in this section bring to life the way in which Nazi discrimination directly impacted on peoples' lives. They challenge us to reflect on how discrimination is experienced today, and to consider - how would we have reacted then and how do we respond in similar situations today?



B'nai B'rith International has advocated for global Jewry and championed the cause of human rights since 1843. B'nai B'rith is recognised as a vital voice in promoting Jewish unity and continuity, a leader in disaster relief, a tireless advocate on behalf of senior citizens and a staunch defender of the State of Israel. With a presence in countries all around the world, B'nai B'rith is the Global Voice of the Jewish Community.

Defiance

The third theme outlines actions that made a difference to victims. The brutal implementation of Nazi policies was meant to subdue local populations and force them into compliance. However, they were often met with resistance from people who believed that what was happening was wrong. A resistance network developed across the continent. At great personal risk, members devised countless ways to save lives.

In this section the desperate need of the victim is linked with the courageous acts of the rescuer. We see the extraordinary results of the actions of individuals and groups who refused to remain passive bystanders. Visitors are invited to question themselves - "would I have remained a bystander, or would I have taken action?"

Empowerment

The fourth theme focuses on the individuals who chose to take positive action. What were the rescuers like? What was their motivation? Why did they act to save lives when others did not? Almost invariably they say, "I only did what was right".

This section reflects on the courage of these individuals and the consequences of their bravery. It challenges and inspires us to learn from their example and ask ourselves what we can do to make a meaningful contribution to our society today.

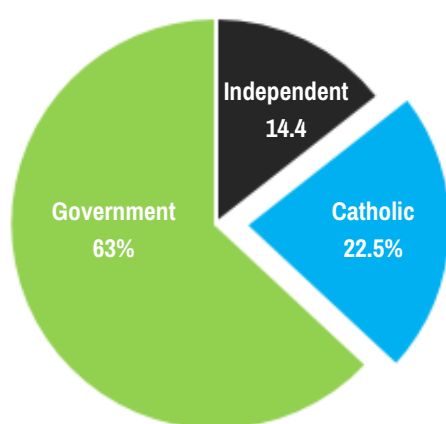
COURAGE TO CARE mounts three or four full Exhibition Programs in Victoria each year, offering free educational workshops to students of metropolitan and regional schools. Workshops are carefully structured and are designed to empower participants to be upstanding in the face of injustice, by giving them an understanding of the consequences of prejudice, both on the individual and on society, and the recognition that each person can make a difference.

FAIR FUNDING

Catholic schools in Victoria

Catholic schools in Victoria educate over 200,000 students, almost one-in-four of all school students in Victoria. These students are educated in 493 Catholic schools which extend right across Victoria.

Percentage of school students in Victoria in 2015



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Catholic Education Commission of Victoria

Funding Catholic education

Catholic schools in Victoria receive significant grants each year, from both the Victorian and Australian governments, to help fund their operational and capital requirements. In 2015, these grants totalled \$2.1 billion.

Catholic schools also have other income sources. These include private income (school fees and charges, interest earned, donations, etc.) for recurrent and capital purposes and new loans.

In total, government grants accounted for 69% of the income of Victorian Catholic schools in 2015.

Government funding for Catholic schools compared to government schools in Victoria

Catholic schools continue to receive significantly less government funding than government schools. In 2014, Catholic schools across Australia received 18% less funding, on average, and in Victoria they received 9% less.

Both government and Catholic schools in Victoria receive considerably less government funding than their counterparts elsewhere in Australia. In the Australian Government's Schooling Resource Standard funding model, both the government school system and the Catholic school system are considered to be 'under-funded', relative to their needs.

Recent trends in funding for Catholic and government schools

In recent years, government funding for Catholic schools has grown faster than government funding for government schools. In 2009, for example, Catholic schools in Victoria received 21% less government funding than government schools but in 2014 this differential had narrowed to 9%.

This has occurred for two main reasons, which are widely ignored or overlooked by those who criticise this pattern of funding growth. First, more students with additional needs are enrolling in Catholic schools. From 2009 to 2013, for example, in Victoria the number of students with disability grew by 37% in Catholic schools but only 10% in government schools. Similarly, the number of Indigenous students grew by 59% in Catholic schools in Victoria but only 27% in government schools.

Under the needs-based funding models used by governments, this means that Catholic schools attract a higher rate of funding growth. It is entirely appropriate that strong growth in enrolments of these students in Catholic schools has brought additional government funding to Catholic schools

The second reason is that some state governments have not pulled

for Catholic Schools

current funding arrangement

their weight in funding education. This mostly impacts government schools because they receive the vast majority of their funding from state governments. In Victoria, for example, from 2009 to 2014, state government funding for government schools decreased by 1.4% in per-student terms. Meanwhile, over that period, Australian Government funding for government schools in Victoria increased by 17.9%.

The Victorian Government is significantly increasing funding for government schools and this increase is welcome. It is the state governments that have primary funding responsibility for government schools – not the Australian Government.

Distribution of government funding to Catholic schools in Victoria

From 2017, all but one Catholic school in Victoria will be members of the Catholic system. As members of the Catholic system, these schools agree to an arrangement called “block funding” whereby government grant entitlements for schools are provided to Catholic system authorities for distribution, according to internal processes and needs-based funding models.

These arrangements enable the Catholic system to use their deeper knowledge of student needs, the school and system costs to better allocate government grants to students and schools, consequently improving equity and efficiency. They also enable Catholic system authorities to guarantee the financial viability of Catholic schools. Due to these advantages, “block funding” arrangements were explicitly endorsed in the final report of the Gonski Review, which recognised that system authorities are better placed than the Australian Government to determine the most effective allocation of available resources.

Accountabilities of Catholic schools for government grants

Catholic education authorities have extensive financial accountabilities to governments for grants. Schools must verify that grants are used for their intended purpose. They must follow processes to enable full disclosure of all school receipts and payments, and school financial statements must be audited each year by an external, qualified party. These are submitted to government.

In addition, some schools (as well as the CECV) are public companies limited by guarantee, so must meet the extensive governance and financial reporting requirements of the Corporations Act 2001. Grant amounts allocated to individual schools by the CECV are also shown on the MySchool website along with other school information.

School accountabilities are set to increase further due to new requirements imposed by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC). All Catholic schools in Victoria will soon be required to meet the financial reporting requirements of the Corporations Act 2001. In addition, detailed school finances will soon be disclosed on a public website. These requirements will not apply to government schools.

Further information on how Catholic system authorities allocate grants to school may be found in the publication ***Allocating government grants to Catholic schools in Victoria*** on the website of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) www.cecv.catholic.edu.au. Grants to individual schools may be viewed on the ***MySchool website***. Information source: Catholic Education Melbourne website - <http://www.cem.edu.au>

Funding for Catholic Schools is under threat due to proposed Federal budget changes. Acting Executive Director of the National Catholic Education Commission, Ms Danielle Cronin said the NCEC is seeking urgent discussions with the Government, to find out exactly how the new funding model will affect individual schools and to seek assurances that the new funding arrangements will not adversely affect Catholic school students and their families, as well as Catholic school teachers and staff.

A CULTURAL IMMERSION

In April this year I had the pleasure of attending the International Conference on Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders in Bhutan. I was invited to share my story of being a self-advocate with Autism alongside my employment journey. It was also a great opportunity to culturally immerse myself in another country and learn about what the Autism community is doing around the world.

It was a new experience for me being my first overseas trip, but I managed the processes of international airports with flying colours. More importantly, I had a new cultural immersion experiencing the uniquely decorated buildings of Bhutan and the traditional dress worn by many locals, including the Prime Minister, local delegates and hotel staff. I tried spicy new foods and even adjusted to the different way cars operate in Bhutan, remembering that their driving habits are different to Australia's and adjusting to seat belts not always being useable in cars.

The conference was a big deal for a smaller country like Bhutan, it was advertised in the local township and gained the attention of the royal family, the Prime Minister and even involved a state visit from the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. A highlight was Bhutanese Prime Minister, Tshering Tobgay, choosing specifically to attend the talk that several self-advocates, including myself, were giving from our personal perspectives, it meant a lot to know that he was effectively choosing to listen to what people on the Autism Spectrum have to say. It was an honour to meet him also.

Other highlights of the conference included meeting members of the Autism community from around the world and learning about what's being done to support people with Autism, especially in developing nations. I also went on a tour of the Ability Bhutan Society which provides early intervention services for local children with disability, along with advocating for the full inclusion of people with disability within Bhutanese society.

My father and I also met with local parents and we shared the experience of my life and the strategies used in my growth, providing hope for these families as they navigate the journey with their children. One family invited us to their home for dinner where we experienced traditional hospitality. We sat on rug covered bench seats with small coffee table sized tables to eat our meals and we also shared a bit of our own nation by singing our national anthems.

Following the conference, we had a weekend to explore Bhutan. In particular, my father and I went to Paro on Sunday with a tour guide. A highlight was trekking halfway up to the Tiger's Nest and enjoying a cup of tea at the café. People also horse ride up the mountain and I enjoyed the mountain scenery, despite the fog.

We also visited temples and a museum before our guide gave us a surprise visit to an old farmhouse that I believe it was centuries old. The property featured terraced paddocks, a ladder to get up into the farmhouse and a barn underneath the house. We enjoyed the hospitality of the farm also.

I returned via Singapore and spent around five days exploring the city. The aim was to build up my confidence of being overseas and to experience a culture that felt more like being in an Australian city; even though there's obviously an Asian culture there. I even explored parts of Singapore on my own during my time there, something I was personally very satisfied with.

I saw some amazing sights in Singapore, especially Marina Bay Sands which is made up of three hotel towers with a boat like structure on top, Gardens by the Bay; with its glass dome conservatories and Sentosa Island which contains theme parks and spectacular views. I also enjoyed a night safari at the zoo, watched the city at sunset and explored Chinatown and Little India.

When visiting the churches around Singapore, I was touched by the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and I reflected on how the Good Shepherd had looked after me throughout my journey, especially through people like my father who accompanied me on the trip.

My prayers from several years ago were answered as I was given the opportunity to assist people with Autism in developing nations. The opportunity came when I least expected it, but I'm glad I went.

I am thankful for what my overseas trip has done for me and especially how it's helped me grow as a person. I have established networks with the worldwide Autism community, built up confidence of being in a different place and experienced a cultural immersion. I am truly thankful to the Catholic Education Office for encouraging me to have this experience and I feel so blessed that Bhutan; along with Singapore, have been my first overseas travel destinations.

"I am thankful for what my overseas trip has done for me and especially how it's helped me grow as a person."

Daniel Giles - Clerical Support Officer
Catholic Education Office Sandhurst



INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON
**AUTISM &
NEURODEVELOPMENTAL
DISORDERS** BHUTAN 2017
19-21 April 2017, Thimphu

A GLOBAL
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The International Conference on Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders was held in Bhutan 19-21st April, 2017. The overall theme of the conference focussed on developing effective and sustainable multi-sectorial programs for individuals, families and communities living with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other neurodevelopmental disorders.



A snapshot (or two) ...



St Joseph's Cobram



St Joseph's Kerang



St Mary's Cohuna



St Augustine's College Kyabram



Catholic College Bendigo



St Patrick's Tongala



St Patrick's Pyramid Hill



Doka School Bendigo

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