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11 Years on in Dubbo

For the past eleven years, Creston College in affiliation with Reledev Australia have organised service projects in Dubbo for groups of young people and the elderly in need.

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Last July and this January, eleven girls from Australia and overseas participated in a week-long holiday program for children living in Apollo Estate, and in the afternoon teamed up with Baptist Care to visit the frail aged and housebound.

Every morning, children from Apollo Estate arrived at Bunninyong Public School to participate in craft and sporting activities, lunch was also provided. The children made artworks and friendship bracelets, learned and taught dances, and played games of soccer and basketball. Every day the group prepared a new craft activity, and the children were encouraged to use their creative skills in a team setting.

Apollo Estate is primarily an indigenous community. The students were briefed on the efforts of community leaders and families to overcome the challenges that they face. This attitude was also evident in the children, and Lucia Garcia, a resident of Creston College, remarked that “despite the fact that many of these children experience poverty and lack opportunities that we take for granted, they maintain an infectious love of life and are

eager to learn and to share. We learnt a lot from their attempts to make a better life for themselves.”

University of New South Wales student, Ovini Sellaperruma, remarked on the value of the opportunity, saying “it keeps you humble and grateful for everything in your life. They enrich our lives.”

During the service project in July, after having lunch at Bunninyong School, the group then split into pairs and visited the homes of the elderly and housebound. The people whom they visited were all part of a program run by Baptist Care, which provides a variety of services to the elderly or less mobile who are living in their own homes, assisting them in retaining their independence. The girls had afternoon tea and a chat with a variety of people over the week, each of whom had fascinating stories to share.

University of Sydney student, Caitlin West, commented, “it’s easy to think that you’re there to entertain these people, and to begin by offering your story, but pretty soon you realise that the best thing you can do is just listen. They all have lived the most incredible lives, and they were so happy to share their stories and open their homes to us. It was a great privilege to be made a part of something so personal.”

During the Service Project in January, the group visited an alternative organisation in the afternoon, Holy Spirit Nursing Home. Here the university students split into smaller groups and provided company to residents with dementia. For many students this was their first experience aiding someone with this condition.

One of the project leaders, Therese Poh, explained that the trip provided

an opportunity for each of the girls to grow in a spirit of service and leadership, “not only in the context of a community project like this, but also in their everyday lives. Service is not merely restricted to events like these, but should be extended to the small things too”.

(For privacy reasons, photos of the children have not been included.)

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