

Dubbo Service Project

For the fourth year in a row, Creston College's service project allowed twenty students from the Universities of New South Wales, Sydney and Technology the opportunity to touch some hearts – both young and old – in the western NSW town of Dubbo.

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While for most university students the word 'holiday' spells parties, relaxation and a respite from the

horrors of exams, for these girls it was an opportunity to entertain young Aboriginal children, work with the elderly of Dubbo and learn about the difficulties facing contemporary Aboriginal communities.

The program is an initiative of Creston College at Randwick and is managed in affiliation with the Gordon Community Centre in Dubbo. Organised by Rosa De Carvalho, the first project took place at the end of 2003. “We are passionate about giving people opportunities to change our community and build hope for a positive future,” she says.

Some of the activities included making puppets, cooking, painting, soccer and an excursion to the Western Plains Zoo. All of the activities and resources were designed and provided by the

students, each intended to amuse a range of age groups.

Service project coordinator De Carvalho said that the project was more than just running activities and instead was more about creating lasting friendships and showing encouragement. “It’s also to help all of us grow in self-confidence and respect for others,” she said.

Honours University of Sydney Science student Tahni Pyke has come every year and believes there is hope for the community especially in the youth. “They’re just beautiful kids and they have a lot of potential and we want to show them they’re valuable children,” she said.

Miss Pyke puts the effectiveness of the program down to the fact that the holiday program is starting to become something they can look forward to.

“I find that every year, the kids respect and look up to you a bit more, and let you more into their lives. If they respect us then they’ll listen to us, and that’s when we are able to help them.”

In the afternoons, the girls made visits and put on concerts for the elderly of the community. For some, this was the most touching part of the journey as it made them treasure the beauty but also the struggle of long life.

Third year University of Technology business student Karen Yuen said she appreciated her time chatting with the elderly in particular.

“I guess the tragedy of life is that your body starts to fail you. One of the ladies was visibly frustrated when she forgot words,” Ms Yuen said. “But seeing them carry on with such a positive outlook – it’s like WOAH!”

However, it was not only the Aboriginal community who reaped the benefits. Its organisers and participants equally profit from the experience.

Principal of Creston College Selena Hooper believes the service project helps the students realise how important it is that they ‘give back’ to the community.

“I see the students as the leaders of tomorrow and if they have a social conscience they will make better citizens and be able to make a better tomorrow,” Ms Hooper said.

“You need to have individuals helping. This will help make them more aware of their own surroundings and what they can do when they go back home.”

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