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University students active in community service

Warrane College promotes
community service initiatives
in Sydney and beyond

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Warrane College, a residential college for men at the University of New South Wales, has launched a number of new community service projects this academic year, helping out with regular assistance to charitable works in Sydney.

One of the projects that students who live at the College have been supporting is the Mount St Joseph's Home for the aged in Randwick, a suburb of Sydney. The home is operated by the Catholic order of nuns, the Little Sisters of the Poor, but students taking part in the project include Hindus, Buddhists and Moslems.

Warrane's Community Services Director, Adhithya Ramani, himself a Hindu who grew up in Singapore, said up to 10 residents had been volunteering each week to carry out chores at the home or simply spend time talking with the residents to help cheer them up.

"Not only has it helped the sisters and the elderly people who live there, but the contact with the elderly has also made a big impression on the students," said

Adhithya, a third-year economics student at UNSW.

“The volunteers meet people they would never normally come into contact with. There was one lady who had celebrated her 107th birthday and was still fit and active, and there was a World War II veteran who talked about some of the things he had experienced in the war.

The pastoral care of Warrane College is entrusted to Opus Dei. In the tradition of Oxbridge colleges, Warrane College promotes academic excellence and a collegial living environment among students, teachers and researchers.

Another regular community service project the College has been carrying out this year has involved helping out the Missionaries of Charity, founded by Blessed Mother Teresa of

Calcutta, at their convent in Surry Hills.

As they do all over world, the missionaries give all their time to working for the poor. The students help the 17 sisters who run the convent with their daily soup kitchen and any other assistance they need.

“Several Warrane residents volunteer every fortnight,” Adhithya said. “They mainly help to prepare and serve the meals for the homeless people, and with maintenance work that needs to be done.”

Adhithya said that contact with homeless people had helped students put their own problems in life in perspective. For instance, some Warrane residents had met a young man who was just like themselves except that he was homeless and without any means of support.

“He was only 20 and it made the students think,” Adhithya said. “They had a real home environment at Warrane and a family that supported them. They were working towards a well-paid career and whatever uncertainties there were about their future, they paled into insignificance alongside the problems of that young man. It really helped them to realise how fortunate they are and how much they have to give to others.”

Other community service projects organised by Warrane in the past have included helping out with the St Vincent de Paul “Task Force” program and many work camps to underprivileged areas in Australia and overseas.

Adhithya said he first became involved in Warrane’s community service program when he joined a group of 20 volunteers who built a science laboratory for students in a

village in Kenya two years ago. The science laboratory is now used by 160 high school students.

Continuing that tradition during the Christmas holidays last year a group of students from Warrane helped to repair and paint the roof of an expansive nursing home in Western Samoa. And plans are already being made for the mid-year break to help with reconstruction work in areas affected by the Queensland floods.

“The main idea is to help out other people, but the projects also help to broaden the horizons of students and change their outlook on the world,” Adhithya said. “Most importantly, they help them to realise how fortunate they are and how much they have to give.”

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