

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

From: Catherine Butterfield, Media and Communications Consultant, Mercy Health

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Students connect with residents through books and song

Grade 2 students from St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Dandenong are turning the tables on adults, reading stories to elderly Mercy Place Dandenong residents every Tuesday morning at the residential aged care home.

The students visit Mercy Place Dandenong every week as part of the home's Intergenerational Program, a program that encourages interactions between the generations.

Age is no barrier for neither residents nor children, Mercy Place Dandenong General Manager Ralf Pelz said.

'The response from the residents has been unbelievable,' he said. 'They love the children so much and the connections that have developed between the residents and children are beautiful. The residents' faces light up when the children arrive, in particular our Memory Support Unit residents. Even though some of them aren't able to communicate that well, they seem to engage really well with the children. We explain to the kids about memory loss too, so they have some understanding.'

'The kids also clearly love being here. They're only here for half an hour each week but when it comes time to leave, they don't want to go.'

Intergenerational Programs help elderly aged care residents to not only re-engage with the world – something that so many elderly residents struggle with when they live in residential aged care – but also to reignite their sense of fun and play.

'Interacting with the children enhances our residents' quality of life,' Ralf said. 'Their faces say it all, really. After the visits, the residents are a lot more cheerful and they seem to be engaging more. Our residents seem happier and enjoy participating in the activities. This program really does help to bring everyone together, and it keeps our residents young.'

St Mary's Primary School Grade 2 teacher Rena Walsh agreed.

'The students at St Mary's have really enjoyed their visits to Mercy Place Dandenong and we believe the program is mutually beneficial,' she said. 'As well as practising their reading and conversational skills, the students have begun to develop positive relationships with the residents. Interacting with older adults has helped them develop their social and communication skills and fosters positive attitudes toward aging, a sense of purpose and community service.'

'To watch the children grow from feeling quite reserved at the first visit to now approaching the residents themselves and beginning conversations is evidence of their eagerness to be part of this relationship. We hope to continue the weekly relationship with Mercy Place Dandenong and have plans for the choir and school band to visit next month.'

Mercy Place Dandenong has adopted a household living approach to aged care. There are eight households within the home, each with 15 residents. Each household has its own living room, kitchen and ensuite bedrooms, while there are also a number of communal areas and courtyards inside Mercy Place Dandenong designed to encourage social interactions between all residents.

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