



LUTHERAN EDUCATION QUEENSLAND

# SERVICE-LEARNING BUILDING STRONG SCHOOL / COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

## A Case Study Narrative

***[Cross-generational Buddy Program between Lutheran Ormeau Rivers District School [LORDS] and TRICARE Aged Care Facility, Pimpama]***

*The Partnership between LORDS and the local TriCare Aged Care Facility at Pimpama aims to build cross-generational relationships between the aged residents in residential care and Year 11 students. Cross-generational buddying provided young people with skills to build cross-generational friendships and better understand the joys and challenges of living through different eras in time. For the aged, buddy-visits provided sustained relationships and interests that contributed to observable improvements in health and well-being.*

## THE CONTEXT

### THE SCHOOL [About LORDS]



Lutheran Ormeau Rivers District School  
LORDS is a school in its 5<sup>th</sup> year of operation. 2016 is the first year that students will graduate from Year 12. The P-12 campus is situated on the edge of a rapidly growing urban area between Beenleigh [south of Brisbane] and the Gold Coast. The school is a Lutheran School. The school community, under the founding leadership of Ms Jodie Hoff, is building a Service-Learning culture. This means the focus for all learners is *“about growing, developing and nurturing students so that they can be the best they can be to make a difference in the world.”*

This school philosophy grows from a Lutheran understanding of vocation and what it means to be human.

From this perspective, education has a dual purpose. First, education enables all students to develop and learn optimally. Second, there is a social responsibility connected to learning that enhances community well-being.

In fact, all student learning contributes to the common good in society; a common good focusing upon humanitarian and ecological needs. The LORDS philosophy emphasises that students of all ages can make a difference. This philosophy has the added benefit of enabling young

*Lutheran schools aim to encourage and support students, informed and sustained by the Word of God, to develop their God-given talents so that they may shape and enrich their world.*

*From A Vision for Learners and Learning in Lutheran Schools*



people to develop a realistic understanding of their local and regional community. In addition, students build a strong sense of belonging as a learner and a contributor.

The school website states: *'this is the core of a good education'* and this *'will be a LORDS education.'*

<http://www.lords.qld.edu.au/index.php/ct-horizontal-menu-newpage2907b/ct-horizontal-menu-principalswelcome71f5>

### **THE AGED CARE FACILITY [About Pimpama Nursing Centre]**

The TriCare Pimpama Aged Care Residence provides a variety of care options for the aged in a semi-rural setting between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. There are up to 127 residents in the residential care unit. Other sections of the complex include a dementia specific unit, respite and palliative care. Residents gather and connect with community members at events such as concerts and church services.



One of the stated goals of TriCare is *"to establish mutually beneficial partnerships between TriCare and the community"* and to be *"cooperative leaders in the provision of programs to the community."*

<http://tricare.com.au/aged-care-locations/pimpama-aged-care-residence/>

As mutually beneficial partnerships were sought, a TriCare reviewer summed up the benefits of existing aged care events that included schools single-visit events by students. At the same time, an overarching issue emerged:

*A number of residents were socially isolated from their families and loved ones... When the school children attended the facility for concerts or performance.... anecdotal evidence indicated increased participation, socialisation and enjoyment as well as a decrease in anti-social behaviours. The children brought a refreshing attitude to TriCare Pimpama that could not be surpassed by Bingo, Hoy or Exercise Classes.*

*[However] A significant proportion of these types of resident social events tended to be one off, single events and our ... [desire] was to have a longer term relationship that was sustainable.*

## **THE NEEDS**

### **SCHOOL NEEDS**

LORDS had been seeking to better understand its local community and was actively seeking opportunities to forge strong local partnerships. The school Principal was keen to provide LORDS learners with opportunities to live the stated ethos and values of the school. Authentic, real-world experiential learning was sought beyond the school fence; opportunities for students to enrich their learning and to contribute positively to the community.



*The Aged Care Buddies Program was developed with these facets in mind – the purpose was to be inclusive and viable in the long term whilst creating a greater feeling of belonging for the residents [by the] enhanced community experience and social interaction.*

A vital component of the school's emerging Service-Learning culture was exploring how Service-Learning concepts could be incorporated into class-room learning and practiced in 'real-life' by as many students as possible. Developing a partnership with the neighbouring aged care institution was likely to provide these kinds of opportunities. Students could experience first-hand, interactions with elderly residents to learn about the gifts and the challenges of aged people in the local community. They would 'come as guest' and honour the 'innate human dignity' of the aged. Orientation would need to be carefully planned and incorporated into classroom lessons.



### **ESTABLISHING A COMMON NEED**

It became clear that a cross-generational buddy program would be ideal for both the students and the aged-care residents. Such a program would meet the self-identified needs of both groups. It was also evident that mutual collaboration, preparation and hard work would be required to move the concept of a cross-generational buddy program to the next phase.

### **THE AGED CARE FACILITY NEEDS**

Meanwhile the neighbourhood, aged care facility had realised that residents of TriCare had been involved in a variety of one-off single events. More sustainable relationships to combat social isolation were sought. The Tri-Care reviewer of the Cross-Generational Buddy program noted:

*We [felt we] could make a greater, sustained contribution and a real difference ...[if the] valuable social interaction... would not conclude at the end of the festive season or a session....*





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## THE PARTNERSHIP STORY

### MAPPING THE PARTNERSHIP

In October 2014 a meeting was organised between Principal Jodie Hoff, Head of Senior School, Stephen Huth and Pastoral Care Coordinator – Years 7-12, Laura Robbins, the Nursing Home Manager and the key overseeing Nurse to discuss the concept of a partnership. From this meeting emerged a clear understanding that a school-based program could be developed that would contribute to their vision and ethos. This same program would “complement and contribute to the residents’ socialisation and feeling of belonging.” The two overarching principles were that the partnership must be:

- a reciprocal partnership to meet the needs of both parties
- sustainable to build and maintain strong inter-generational relationships.



An overall summary of the project was devised by the educators. The Tri-Care leaders contributed to the program by designing, allocating and evaluating the residents that would most benefit from the extended social contact of the students. Subsequently, TriCare staff “met with the Year 11 teachers and students to discuss

*the opportunities for social fulfilment for the residents, as well as incorporating the ethos of the school and the educational outcomes for assessment requirements for the children. The overall plan was to develop the learnings and assessable outcomes, whilst enabling the students and residents to benefit from the relationship”*

*TriCare Reviewer*

### STUDENT PREPARATION [in class and beyond]

Student learning topics focused upon understanding aging and the associated issues as well as understanding the linking Service-Learning concepts [Come as Guest, Innate Dignity [Story and Presence]. Key ideas were drawn from Lutheran Education Australia’s Christian Studies Curriculum Framework and the QCAA Study of Religion and Ethics approved school Work Program.



Student learning experiences included 3 x 30 minute lessons with nursing home staff, a Service-Learning Retreat Day, social skills training focusing on cross-generational situations, an orientation visit to the aged care facility and the creation of [Student] Buddy Profiles.

Significant questions that shaped the learning experiences included:

- *What is ageism? In what ways does it operate in our society?*
- *How is social isolation a crippling factor for senior citizens? What can we do to combat this social justice issue?*
- *Is it possible for young people and old people to learn from each other simultaneously? How can we establish a reciprocal partnership that meets the needs of all involved?*
- *How do we move past stereotypes, and come to see people for who they really are?*
- *How do we “come as guest”?*
- *What is the Christian perspective on care for those in need?*



*procedural training such as “fire / evacuation mandatory training [that would be required by] the students and teachers” during an orientation visit. More importantly, other training included “dementia and grief and loss training as well, to suitably prepare the students for the variables of Aged Care.”*

*TriCare Reviewer*

## **AGED CARE RESIDENTS PREPARATION**

Whilst the students were undergoing their own preparation, relevant staff at the Aged Care facility prepared by selecting and discussing the program with potential aged care participants. Staff developed a process to select residents “who would benefit the most from social situation building with the students”. The TriCare staff reported:

*“We spoke to the residents about the project and were enthusiastically surprised at the positive reaction of the residents [we] approached. [We] “evaluated Aged Care compliance including the requirement of police checks.*

Later, other residents asked for LORDS buddies too.

*In addition, the TriCare staff organised a specific learning program for school staff and students. There was the necessary*



This preparation was a term long. [see Appendix 1].

## **SUSTAINED RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: DEEP LEARNING**

From the school’s perspective, a different level of organisation was required during the visitation semester. All of the preparation was to be ‘put into practice’. The emphasis was upon real-life, experiential learning. The timetable was



'chunked' to ensure the visits were substantial and did not feel rushed. This also enabled the de-brief process to occur in an integrated manner.

The Pastoral Care Coordinator Years 7-12 provided organisational details. She notes:

*"Every three weeks have the LORDS timetable structured to provide Christian Studies with Pastoral Care – Period 3 (8:30 – 12pm). During this time students:*

- *prepare for the visit*
- *walk to the home*
- *spend 1.5 hours with their buddy*
- *walk back to school (informal debrief and story sharing time)*
- *have structured reflection and journal writing time.*

*During the other two weeks, students write letters as part of maintaining the contact and relationship building.*



Both formative and summative assessment provided opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning gleaned through this real-life connection. The major assessment pieces were as follows:

#### **Term 3 Assessment**

Feature Article - Using a stimulus, the students write a feature article about

the importance of buddy programs in: (1) challenging stereotypes and changing peoples' understandings of senior citizens, (2) combating the issue of social isolation and loneliness amongst senior citizens.

#### **Term 4 Assessment**

A spoken Reflection, based on the Service-Learning Program with nursing home staff as audience, and a Training Brochure to be used in Term 2, 2016 with Year 11s.

The cross-generational buddy program provided additional opportunities to share the learning and to build a deeper appreciation of what a lived Service-Learning culture looked like. Additional communication to diverse audiences included:

- Ongoing newsletter write-ups
- Week 9 Assembly Sharing (Term 3)
- Pastoral Care Coordinator Years 7-12 – sharing with all staff
- Semester 1 2016: Year 12s leading the Year 11 training.

#### **Reflection**

Reflection is a significant component of Service-Learning. If there is to be an opportunity to enhance learning there is the belief that substantial time for individual and community sharing time is a **critical** aspect of the program, not an add-on. Reflection opportunities in Semester 2 included informal reflection time on the walk back, structured reflection for 30 minutes after returning to school using strategies such as circle time, discussion questions. On occasion the Tri-Care Staff liaison visited the students.



Reflection time also included student-led preparation for next visit. During this period, the staff at the aged care facility witnessed the residents' responses to this sustained social contact. They noted that the residents 'warmed' and the students 'relaxed' as the visitation program developed its own collegial, almost familial rhythm and routine.

TriCare staff provided an audience for Term 4's assessment; their spoken reflections. The TriCare reviewer shared his response to these presentations:

*At the conclusion of the final term the class gave a summation and dissertation... The entire class individually presented a PowerPoint presentation and an overview of their experiences - the good, the bad and the ugly...*

*I am a 59 year old man (I am supposed to be tough) and I was physically holding back tears thinking that I was glad to be at the back of the classroom so that the children would not see me so emotional.*

TriCare Reviewer

## THE BENEFITS

### THE BENEFITS [Aged Care Facility Perspective]

At the end of last year, the TriCare Reviewer also noted the affective impact of the program:

*The resounding impression of the experience was one of mutual fulfilment and enrichment. The students gave a heart-rending reflection focusing on their initial apprehension prior to the visit, the tears of sympathy at the plights of infirm residents and the heartfelt emotion of the process of*

*getting to know [and form friendships with ] their buddies.*

*These relationships have lasted well past the end of the school year and completion of the project. The students still come down to the facility after school and during their holidays. The enrichment and fulfilment of the social aspect of the visits progressed well past solely sitting with a person and having a chat.*

*The benefits of the program included anecdotal evidence of calmer residents during and after the visit.*

*Several residents displayed a significant decrease in challenging behaviours and were more settled and communicative.*



Specific examples of the positive benefits noted by the Tri-Care reviewer included:

*One female resident had a noted decrease in the use of PRN medication for pain and behaviours, notably as a resident dependent on prescription pain relief, she is now free from pain medication excepting for the occasional headache. She discusses with glee at the next visit of her buddy.*

*Another male resident with challenging behaviours, including physical*



*agitation, was not only more settled prior to the visits, but anticipative of his buddy coming and the social interaction that followed. Following the visit he was laughing and jovial.*

*One resident suffered with asocial behaviours. He had no family visit him and had not been allocated a buddy at that time. He noticed that other residents were being visited by the school children and requested that we look at “finding him a friend”. We allocated an Aged Care Buddy to him and he became more social and amiable, whereas previously he had been cranky and obtuse.*

#### In summary

*We learned not to under-estimate the power of children and their kindness to the elderly. We learned to prepare to be amazed at the positive outcomes around anticipation of the students arrival (often days prior) and the sheer joy of the sustained mateship that developed between the students, the residents and the staff.*



*I learned to be humbled by the significant contribution that increased socialisation gave to our residents.*

*Afterwards residents and students, spoke of their experiences with fondness for the visit and excitement for the next fortnight. The residents spoke with joy at the interactions and the bonding of relationships.*

### **THE BENEFITS [The School Perspective]**

From the students' perspective, their learning is best demonstrated by summarised key reflections that they are willing to share. One student wrote as part of her feature article:

*Stepping into the lives of these people was not just a confronting, but rewarding experience. I would be lying if I said this experience was not a daunting and scary one. I only understood the full benefits and impact I had made on my buddy's life when one of the staff members had approached me after the visit saying that they had never seen my buddy as happy as what she was... I began to put myself into my buddy's, and the other resident's shoes. It was only then I began to realise the stereotypes and problems associated with old age. I myself, was a victim of letting stereotypes surrounding old age hinder the way I viewed the people in this home before I even entered the facility.*

*There are social stigmas associated with people from all walks of life, however, seniors and young people are the ones hit the hardest by these misconceptions, usually from each other. Many seniors are viewed as being incapable of caring and forming opinions for themselves. They are also seen as weak and incapable... This is just one of the many benefits of a*





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*buddy program within our society today.*

*These programs, not only enable both parties to step into the lives of one another and dismantle negative stereotypes, but establish the idea of innate dignity... All in all, from my experience I can successfully say that buddy programs are beneficial to not one, but both the young, and the old. By establishing this program within schools for all ages, it dismantles negative stereotypes, and enables one to step outside their comfort zone, and form a relationship with someone they wouldn't normally...*



Other students made different insightful comments in their individual reflection journals, which were shared with the school community at the Middle School / Senior School Expo Evening:

- *"I have learnt that senior citizens have a very good sense of humour."* – Alex
- *"We talk about lots of things such as politics, puzzles, rock music, and magic tricks."* – Sean
- *"I have learnt that there are a lot of stereotypes about old age – and lots of*

*them aren't true. Senior citizens are very sweet and polite."* – Claudia

- *"My buddy suffers from severe dementia. During my visit with her I have learnt that I have the courage to communicate with someone, even when they don't recognise me / think I am someone else."* – Skye
- *"Social isolation is a problem for older people, as sometimes they don't get to experience having face to face conversations and it isolates them from the world."* – Shelby
- *"In training I learnt about things that happen in nursing homes and what to expect. We learned how to deal with different situations – like if someone forgets things, or if there is a bad smell. The training prepared us for reality, so that there were less surprises when we went."* – Amie
- *"I have learnt that there is more to senior citizens than what you see – that they have their own stories and life experiences."* – Angela
- *"I felt nervous at first, but then I felt comfortable because Patricia started to open up to me. I listened to her stories and she asked me questions."* – Erin





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### SUMMING UP

Participation in the cross-generational buddy program has increased the students' levels of empathy for the aged. The experience also heightened the students' levels of engagement in Christian Studies and provided opportunities for a broad group of students to demonstrate leadership responsibilities within the school community.

When reflecting upon 'learning that enhances the common good', Lutheran Theologian and philosopher, Tom Christenson provided this perspective with yet a deeper challenge:

*"Inquiry, knowing and learning [that is] shaped by the question "How does this serve the needs of the world?" will be appreciatively different from knowing not accompanied by such a question... Learning shaped by the idea of vocation will be closely connected to service..."*

Tom Christenson

Learning for the adults and students alike in the Tri-Care / LORDS Cross-generational Buddy Program provides an example of one school taking Christenson's challenge seriously. Students have opportunities to see themselves as contributors, listeners and learners developing the concepts of 'guest-ness' [John 13:1-17 Jesus Washes the Disciples Feet] and innate human dignity [Luke 19:1-10 Zacchaeus the Tax Collector]. Relationships have been established that are empathetic, reciprocal and humble. For young and old, service

and learning is for all. Service-Learning is for all.

***"Service in response to God's love is at the heart of all that we do."*** [LEA: "Growing Deep". 2016]

Meg Noack

Director of Learning and Teaching  
Lutheran Education Queensland

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The TriCare Reviewer of the program acknowledged the hard work and dedication of staff from both the school and the TriCare facility.

Special mention is made of *"Tina Eales (Pimpama Aged Care Facility) and Laura Robbins (LORDS) - ...two significant contributors who gave their personal time and were wholeheartedly dedicated to make this project work. Moreover they strived for the project to be a sustainable, meaningful encounter that was not dependent on any personal foci, a time-bound plan nor a seasonal celebration that concluded on the 24th of December."*

In addition, the Reviewer notes:

*The staff and the teachers involved deserve medals for their tenacity, hard work and personal involvement that they all contribute... The staff involved focused on the bigger picture and developed the plan to be self-perpetuating and curriculum / outcome based for the students and a meaningful quality outcome for the residents.*



**SOURCE DOCUMENTS**

*Aged Care Buddies Report – TriCare Pimpama*

*A Vision for Learners and Learning in Lutheran Schools - LEA*

*Embedding Service-Learning into LORDS Culture – Jodie Hoff (LORDS)*

*Growing Deep - LEA*

*Partnering for School Improvement – ACER*

*Service-Learning in Action – Laura Robbins (LORDS)*

*Volunteer Orientation – TriCare*

**Appendix 1: A 12 month cycle of inter-generational relationship-building**

	<b>Term 1</b>	<b>Term 2</b>	<b>Term 3</b>	<b>Term 4</b>
<b>2015</b>		<i>Year 11s begin learning about aged care and the needs of senior citizens</i>	<i>Year 11s continue to train and learn. Year 11 start to “do” the Service-Learning program as part of the Christian Studies unit.</i>	<i>Year 11s continue to train and learn. Year 11 “do” the Service-Learning program as part of the Christian Studies unit.</i>
<b>2016</b>	<i>Year 12s help to train the Year 11s</i>	<i>Year 12s help train the Year 11s</i>	<i>Year 11s continue to train and learn. Year 11 start to “do” the Service-Learning program as part of the Religious Education unit.</i>	<i>Year 11s continue to train and learn. Year 11 start to “do” the Service-Learning program as part of the Religious Education unit.</i>