



## Homework Club celebrates another year of achievement

In late December, the Flemington Homework Club wrapped up another successful year with a celebration for students, families, volunteers and donors at the Venny, a community hub in Kensington that provides a supervised 'backyard' space for local children.

Jesuit Social Services established the Homework Club in 2004 as part of our Settlement Program, to provide out of school hours learning support to school aged students from refugee and migrant backgrounds who are living on the Flemington public housing estate. It operates two nights a week during school term and engages volunteers to support participants and their families to overcome barriers to educational achievement.

Settlement Program Coordinator Kim Malone says that events like this one provide alternative learning opportunities and contribute to the broader wellbeing of participants. "In addition to our regular offering, we aim to provide an activity every school holidays. This year, we collaborated with other Jesuit Social Services' programs - The Outdoor Experience and the Centre for Just Places - to design activities that encourage participants to engage with nature while learning about their local area.

A highlight was connecting the Homework Club community with a Wurundjeri elder, who performed a Welcome to Country at an outdoor activity focused on Indigenous culture and history.

This was an opportunity for some of our newest arrivals to listen to, and learn from, the wisdom of First Nations people".

Kim says that access to outdoor spaces like the Venny, a free communal backyard and safe space for children aged 5 to 16, has been all the more important since the pandemic, when young people completed extended periods of remote learning and reported being tired of desk-based learning. "We consulted with the young people and they attributed good mental health to sport, being with friends and family, and developing self-esteem through learning. We've incorporated this into program delivery".

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## Supporting people to lead fulfilling lives through study and work

Access to education, training and employment opportunities is foundational for people to lead productive and fulfilling lives. Without the ability to learn, develop skills or secure work, it is extremely difficult for people to reach their potential.

For more than 45 years, Jesuit Social Services has worked with people who have had limited access to school and work, including people who have had contact with the justice system, people with mental illness and people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

That's why we have developed a range of tailored, supportive programs to help people engage or re-engage with study and work, while simultaneously increasing their social skills, self-esteem and work readiness. This includes our Jesuit Community College, a Registered Training Organisation, which we opened in 2011. The College draws on the rich tradition of Jesuit education committed to 'care of the whole person' and development of active and informed citizens, supporting people and communities to flourish.

In this newsletter, you will read about how our education, training and employment programs make a tangible difference to the lives of people who have otherwise experienced barriers to accessing support and securing employment. This work has now expanded beyond our Jesuit Community College to include: a school for boys aged 15-17 years who have had contact with the criminal justice system; a not-for-profit café where people can learn hospitality skills; and the Navigator program which works with children disengaged from education, their school and their family to keep students engaged and give them the best opportunity to succeed.

Every day we deliver this important work in support of our big vision to build a just society. I thank you for your support which remains as vital as ever.

Warm regards,

**Julie Edwards**  
CEO, Jesuit Social Services

## Homework Club celebrates another year of achievement

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In between bike riding, trampolining and a very popular sausage sizzle at the Venny, students shared what the Homework Club and its activities meant to them. Grade Two student Siman says the help from the team was his highlight. "They're very nice. Especially the helpers and staff members. They help you turn smart." Grade Six student Guuleed told us "Homework Club is fun, it's cool, it's nice. People help you like if you're struggling with some work, they will help you and they're kind and lovely and they're nice. They help us a lot, and we really enjoy it."

While Homework Club has clear benefits for the students, it is also a weekly highlight for the dedicated team of volunteers, who range from people at the beginning of their careers gaining exposure to teaching and learning to communicate with young people, to those at the end of their working lives looking to give back to the community.

Miriam is volunteering while finishing her teaching degree and says "the kids are all really curious to learn, so when you've got something to offer them, they're ready to take it all in, which I think is really good for their development and education. It's a wholesome way to spend your time, getting out in the community, meeting new people and stepping out of your comfort zone.

Daria recently retired and volunteers because "I wanted to do something for the community. I love the children..you can pick up on things they don't understand and make them simpler. It's a beautiful experience."



*Miriam and Daria are part of the dedicated team of the Homework Club volunteers looking to give back to the community.*

## Celeste's story

Jesuit Community College student Celeste\* was involved with the justice system and was enrolled in a course as part of her Community Corrections Order. She wrote to College staff to thank them for their support as she built self-esteem and pride through her experience of studying.



“When you first came along, I'm sorry to say that I was one of the people that hated the idea and gave you such a hard time. Even though we were pretty nasty, you were so calm and kind, and never stopped explaining why you and the Jesuit College believe that learning is so important for everyone.

I am so happy that you didn't give up on me and I'm telling you this so you know that what you do is really important. I want to thank you for your persistence, kindness, intelligence and understanding.

As you know, I never finished school, and when you met me I couldn't stop talking, interrupting, arguing and creating drama and chaos in the class. I hated classes when I was a kid, so I sure didn't want to have to do any more as a grown up. These were all bad habits I'd used at school many years ago and also in the prison system. I've started now to understand many of the things we discussed in your class such as to 'pick my battles' and... I've learnt to try new things without arguing before I try it. I'm still fiery, but I have learnt to use strategies and think my reactions through before going off.

I loved the start of class: 'check your baggage', and the end of session reflections activity we did every week. It took a while for me to stop complaining and 'go with the process' but now I've left and I'm keeping a gratitude journal as well as taking time at the end of each day to think of my apples and onions for the day. I get the kids to do this at the dinner table too and it's become a way that we have started talking more positive together. Other things I really enjoyed the most were that you made maths fun (!) and that I actually loved doing all those 'increase your vocabulary' activities. You are surely one of the most creative teachers I have ever had and it is because of you that I am confident for the very first time ever to help my children with their homework.

I don't feel like an idiot anymore when my kids are doing their maths or English or whatever homework, I just take a deep breath and act confident and give it a go and I know they are so happy to have me helping them now. I don't feel stupid and I don't feel like they think I'm stupid. Like you said, there's nothing wrong with not knowing an answer, but just being there to help find it. It is the best feeling, being respected by my children and feeling useful and making them happy all rolled together – so good.

So, before I get too emotional, I will say that I'll never forget you and, though I'm sad to not see you again, I'll always remember how you farewelled us when we finished, saying I'll miss seeing you in the class but I hope I never see you again!

When you said this we know that you care and you truly want us not to break the law again and end up back in your class (or prison) and you honestly want us to move, as you say, inwards and outwards, onwards and upwards.

I followed some more of your advice and 'kept the ball rolling' ASAP by enrolling in the Jesuit Community College course you told me about – the Animal Studies course, and I've been going from the Mornington all the way to Brunswick and I'm loving it! Who would have thought when we first met that I could or would choose to study more? YOU – probably!

I'm leaving this program so grateful to you and the Jesuit Community College – for having the faith in me to see that I could change and for helping me to believe that I could become three things I had long ago given up on being – a good mother, a good student and a good person.

Love and gratitude,

*Celeste*

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\*Name changed to protect identity



## Structural and locational barriers to education, training and employment

At Jesuit Social Services, we believe all persons must have access to the opportunities that help them flourish. Fundamental to this is the role of education, lifelong learning and employment. We know that when people are able to fully access education, training and employment, this has significant benefits for their own wellbeing, their family's wellbeing and the wellbeing of communities.

Unfortunately, many individuals and communities are missing out on access to these opportunities due to generational and multi-layered disadvantage.

Jesuit Social Services' Dropping off the Edge 2021 report gathered data on 37 indicators of disadvantage in every single community across the country and found that low levels of internet access and students dropping out before completing Year 10 were prevalent in areas of high disadvantage.

When we focus specifically on locations in both Victoria and NSW that have extreme disadvantage on at least eight different indicators, we find high numbers of children growing up in a household with no adult in paid work and high numbers of young people not engaged with education, employment or training. In fact, in the three per cent most disadvantaged locations in both states, we found children growing up in jobless households at almost triple the rate of the rest of the state, and young people not engaged in education or employment at over double the rate.

Jesuit Social Services is deeply concerned that a number of communities across the country are caught in a complex web of disadvantage, bearing the brunt of poor policy and the absence of necessary supports.

Poverty and complex disadvantage pose significant barriers to gaining work for current and future generations; and children in disadvantaged families are more likely to experience disrupted education, with lasting impacts on their employment prospects.

### What should be done?

In supporting people to reach their full potential we must address the structural barriers to participation that many people face. Jesuit Social Services' recent submission to the Federal Government's Employment White Paper called for the government to act decisively to:

- Commit to a **Living Wage** for all Australians above the current subsistence level of welfare payments and expand eligibility.
- Address the persistent and intergenerational disadvantage and unemployment that is experienced by individuals and families in many areas around Australia by developing a **Social Inclusion Fund** and accompanying Strategy.
- Commit to **full access to employment** and employment opportunities to ensure no one is left behind.
- Create pathways to **good jobs in clean energy, land care and management, and other regenerative and sustainable industries**.
- **Guarantee opportunities for young people** leaving school to access education, training and employment so they don't get left behind and/or fall further behind.
- **Fully utilise the skills of people** who come to Australia through skilled migration programs or as refugees.
- Establish a **people centred and voluntary employment service system**, delivered by the community and not-for-profit sector.
- Implement a **Federal Social Procurement Policy that includes clear and ambitious targets** for creating meaningful employment opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage and addresses cultural issues related to the **safety of women and other minority groups in male-dominated industries**.

With these changes in place, we believe individuals, families and entire communities will flourish.

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Read our submission to the Employment White Paper here: <https://jss.org.au/policy-submissions/ensuring-no-one-gets-left-behind-employment-white-paper-response/>

Find out more about *Dropping off the Edge 2021* here: <https://www.dote.org.au/>

## Volunteer role helps Max remember his value

When Max began volunteering at Ignite Café, he had difficulty holding a conversation and lacked the skills and confidence he needed to find work.

Jesuit Social Services' Ignite Café - a not-for-profit café in Camberwell, Melbourne - is more than just a place for volunteers like Max to practise their employability skills, Café Manager Thea says.

"Ignite is a place where people who may feel disengaged and disconnected from life and community have a chance to recognise themselves as having a place in society, having value," she says.

Thea says that Max has become one of Ignite's strongest volunteers. "Not only has he built the skills he needs for work, but he's developed a desire to become more independent and engage more with life outside his family home. Now he's bantering with team members and customers, and he has stories to share around the dinner table. He's found a sense of purpose and pride and he's able to relate more to other people."

Ignite Café is the setting for Jesuit Community College's accredited Café Operations course, which Max completed before deciding to become a volunteer. Thea says there are lots of reasons why a person might volunteer with Ignite, but for Max volunteering was a way to deepen the skills he first learned in the Café Operations course.

"We're basically a living classroom. We support participants with whatever it is they want to learn, and volunteers are free to choose how they want to engage.

"One of our other volunteers is a woman who has been with us for a few years. When she started, we noticed she was terrified of doing any of the service aspects aside from being on the till and the dishes. We supported her with a lot of one-on-one help which helped build her confidence. Not only is she now able to make food and coffees, but she's applied those skills to her home life, cooking meals for herself and her family," Thea says.

Ignite's priority is nurturing participants and volunteers. Staff and trainers have a strong background in hospitality and share the ethos of creating a welcoming and inclusive space for community.

"Some of us have experiences working in toxic hospitality environments and so we set out to make Ignite a place where everyone can feel safe to learn and belong - whether that's participants and volunteers, staff, or the wider community."

Volunteers can stay as long as they want, but when they are ready Jesuit Social Services' employment program supports them to find work.

"We're supporting Max to look for work right now. We know he's ready. Since starting he's built the confidence to be able to deal with feedback without catastrophising, and the self-esteem and resilience to keep trying when he gets knocked back from a job application.

"Max knows we'll always be here to support and encourage him to keep going," Thea says.



*Ignite Café's priority is to nurture participants and volunteers, helping them gain confidence and learn transferable skills.*

## City trip builds confidence and connection for school-disengaged teens



*Navigator participants were taken by their case managers to see the State Library and its magnificent dome, and Melbourne's famous street arts.*

Hanging out with friends in the city during school holidays is a rite of passage for most Melbourne teenagers – but for many of the young people who are supported by our Navigator program, that opportunity lies on the other side of big barriers.

"We're talking about young people who essentially don't leave the house – there's social anxiety, diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder, mental health concerns, and low socio-economic backgrounds that mean young people have missed out on opportunities."

Jasmine Kokonis is a case manager in Navigator, which supports young people aged 12-17 who have attended 30 per cent or less of the previous school term or are not in education at all.

That disengagement not only restricts the educational progress young people can make – it means many have missed out on school-based opportunities like excursions and holiday programs.

In January, Jasmine and another Navigator case manager, Emily Moustafa, decided to change this – running a scavenger hunt across Melbourne's CBD for 11 of the young people the program supports.

"It ran it over two Wednesdays in the lead-up to the return to Term 1 – almost like a mini re-engagement project, to get young people to step outside of their comfort zones, socialise; build a bit of confidence," Jasmine said.

"For these young people, leaving their home is such a big deal," Emily said. "We thought, how can we incorporate something that is fun, resilience-building and empowering into a school holiday program?"

From Jesuit Social Services' office in the inner Melbourne suburb of Brunswick, case managers escorted small groups of young people on the tram into the city, where they were given questions and puzzles to resolve at iconic Melbourne locations, including Flinders Street Station, Queen Victoria Market, Hosier Lane, and the State Library of Victoria.

Students learnt facts about Ned Kelly, photographed the oversized chess set and magnificent domed roof at the State Library, saw street art in Melbourne's famous laneways, counted the clocks and named the nearby restaurant floating in the Yarra River at Flinders Street Station, and tried new foods like dumplings, sushi and kimchi for lunch.

While the young people were initially nervous about participating, by the end of the hunt feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

"They were excited, energised, connected," said Emily.

"One mum said her daughter came home and could not stop talking about it. It was new experiences, building resilience, meeting other young people who feel the same way they do – participants were like, 'I was able to cope in a social situation; I did it!'"

Emily and Jasmine said the school holiday program was not only fun – it will help young people build the skills and confidence necessary to facilitate their re-engagement with education.

"Our goal is always to get the young person to school but it takes so much to help them get there," said Jasmine.

"The city experience showed a lot of people coming out of their comfort zones, and feeling confident and comfortable to try new things. It was so empowering – it reminded young people that school term is coming up and they've got the skills and qualities to handle it.

"The reason school is so important is for learning and social connection," said Jasmine.

"I think that's what this program offered, even though it wasn't a formal school setting."

*Navigator is funded by the Victorian Government's Department of Education, but many activities designed to enhance the program and improve engagement with students are only possible thanks to donations from generous supporters of Jesuit Social Services.*



## Justice-involved teens encouraged to self-express through art gallery visit



*Ignatius Learning Centre's recent trip to the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) gave Adam the chance to explore, learn about some of history's greatest artists, and perhaps rekindle his love of learning.*

Education is about more than learning. It's about sparking curiosity, encouraging reflection and opening possibilities.

Unfortunately, many of the students at Jesuit Social Services' Ignatius Learning Centre have had a bad experience of school and have disengaged or become disinterested.

The Ignatius Learning Centre is a small independent Catholic school for boys aged 15-17 who are in contact with the criminal justice system. Jesuit Social Services opened the school in 2021 as an alternative to youth detention and an opportunity to help these boys to get their lives on track and realise their potential.

While the school is focused on engaging students and helping them complete VCAL before moving on to further training or employment, teachers also harbour dreams to expand the horizons for these young men and help them discover a love of life-long learning.

Lead Teacher at the school, John Pritchard, together with another teacher at the school, Nicholas Porter, began working with staff at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) to provide an opportunity for students to visit and learn more about art and the lives of some of history's greatest artists.

"A lot of our students are creative but have a limited understanding of what creativity is," said John. "Giving them this experience might unlock something else – a career path, or something they're interested in, or understand themselves a little more."

While an excursion like this could be incredibly daunting for students at the school, John and Nicholas worked hard, and for many weeks, to normalise the trip and allay any fears. This included having the NGV education lead, David Menzies, attending the school to present to students on what they would encounter.

Finally, in December, the excursion took place and the impact was exactly what John and Nicholas were hoping for. One student, Adam\*, was first enthralled by the stained glass ceiling in the great hall before touring exhibits where he was particularly interested in the stories behind Picasso's "Weeping Woman" and Tiepolo's "The Banquet of Cleopatra".

"Adam asked really insightful questions about the art and reflected on his own thoughts and feelings on seeing the pieces," said John. "He plans to return with his girlfriend and share his new insights. It's great to see him so passionate about something new."

With one successful excursion under their belts, the team at the Ignatius Learning Centre is looking forward to an ongoing relationship with the gallery in the hope of sparking curiosity and a love of life-long learning.

*This opportunity was made possible thanks to support of good friend and donor to the Ignatius Learning Centre, Krystyna Campbell-Pretty.*

# For many of our participants, mainstream education and training is simply not enough.

Our various education, training and employment programs are created with our participants' unique needs, strengths and challenges in mind so we can support them to learn, grow and thrive.

Please help us support individuals, families and communities to reach their full potential.

## Want to help Jesuit Social Services?

Together we can build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the wellbeing of disadvantaged people, family and communities.

### I would like to make an ongoing monthly gift of:

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