



Cartoon: Hannah Gee

Helping those who are in need of care

EDITORIAL

By **HARRISON KING, LIAM O'CONNOR and BLAKE VESIC**

WE have always been told that Australia is the lucky country. However, what we found might change that stereotype.

According to acoss.org.au, an estimated 12.8 per cent of all Australians are currently living below the poverty line. Even more disturbing is that on any given night, according to the Australian Census of 2011, there were 105,237 people without a home to go to.

So how can we make a difference? Every day in the Muswellbrook community, various groups help out the poor, sick and others in need.

A not-for-profit organisation which gives parental help and education to children aged up to six years is a terrific group called "Toy Box". They are situated in Muswellbrook. Various activities include; craft, sport, story time and music time.

Another group who operate in the Upper Hunter are Meals on Wheels. Meals on Wheels is an organisation that helps feed the poor and the disabled. It is a big help because its delivered to people who need it most.

But our help goes further afield too. At St James' there is a group called Mini Vinnie's which donates money to various causes around Australia and more importantly, the local community. This term, the year 6 students have sold Milo each week with the profits going to brain cancer research. The children also have mission days which helps people from other countries.

As a Catholic school, St James' also has liturgies that celebrate things like Anzac Day, Mother's Day and more. It is in prayer where the school gets together and supports the community who need it most.

Every year goods are donated to unlucky people in Cambodia via Project Compassion.

The school participates in Clean Up Australia Day by going around the school, picking up any rubbish that can be seen. This teaches children to become stewards of their environment.

More recently, students took an oath to "Stand Up Against Bullying", where banners and pledges were placed proudly around the school. Each class has its own pledge which will hopefully assist with a community approach to help others in need.

Maybe you can think outside the home you live in, if only for a short time, and see if you can help someone in need too.

Horse riding builds self-esteem and joy

By **ISABELLE DIMMOCK, NELLIE WITT and CLARE HOWARD**

MANY people with special needs find life very difficult and encounter many challenges.

Riding Develops Abilities (RDA) is a program which builds self-esteem in children and adults from all around NSW, in particular, the Upper Hunter.

The first Australian Riding for the Disabled group started in 1964 near Brisbane and the first RDA in NSW was formed by Pearl Batchelor and Nan Eventsham in 1972.

RDA NSW now comprises 39 centres across the state. It is a non-for-profit organisation which, according to Chris Hayes, president of the Upper Hunter RDA branch, aims to: "Give the children with special needs joy, be happy, relax and come out of their shells."

Ms Hayes has been involved with the RDA for 24 years this August and she was inspired to join as one of her family members was a keen horse rider and was involved in an accident.

"It can be a challenge sometimes to help some people to be calm and open up their abilities to relax on a horse," Ms Hayes said. "Disabled people benefit in many ways: physically, mentally and competitively."

There are currently 40 riders from the Upper Hunter who come from Singleton, Scone and Muswellbrook.



Jake Ballard enjoying his riding with assistants Lea and Allen.

Picture: Clare Howard

St James' own, Jake Ballard, a year 4 student with cerebral palsy, is a beneficiary of RDA's programs.

Jake currently rides one day per week in terms 2 and 3 and has for five years. "Going to RDA makes me excited," Jake said. He relishes the opportunity to ride Annie and Patch with "Mrs Howard taking me on the big blue party bus" to the centre on

Sandy Creek Road, Muswellbrook.

RDA NSW currently seeks donations for a covered arena, which will cost approximately \$200,000. This will benefit students by keeping them and their horses dry in inclement conditions.

Donations may be made on rdansw.org.au or by contacting Chris Hayes on 0468 370 846.

Conservatorium will move to the music

By **BAYLEE JOHNS, DECLAN O'SULLIVAN and HAYDN PORTOLAN**

FOR over 15 years, the Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music has been providing music education and opportunities to the people of the region.

The Conservatorium encourages and supports students of all ages and levels to achieve musical goals and dreams and is a source of inspiration for those "in the biz".

Currently the conservatorium is located at 8 Sowerby Street, Muswell-

brook. Renovations are being conducted at Bridge Street, above the IGA supermarket.

The upgrades, according to Jeremy Fletcher, director of the Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music, "include expansion, more rooms and brighter and larger building space."

This upgrade is beneficial for the students as well as the employees as "more people will hear others playing and will want to

join. This will bring in more students and it will open more job opportunities for adults." Mr Fletcher has been in the role since February 2015.

He loves his job because he "gets to listen to amazing music".

The overall cost of the renovation and relocations is approximately \$6.5 million.

State government and local council have contributed to this project.

It is expected to be completed in early December 2015.



Jeremy Fletcher, director of Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music.

Picture: Baylee Johns

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