

Primary entry #25: Merriwa Central School



THE GATEPOST



NETWORK: Naketta Cameron, Liana Byfield, Tiara Edens-Rosa, Brooke Sampson, Annabelle Orton and Toby Fairhall.

Picture: Amber Pittman

Support at hand to deal with bullying

By **TIARA EDENS-ROSA, NIKKI ANSHAW** and **AMBER PITTMAN**

ACCORDING to the Centre for Adolescent Health, which in 2006 surveyed 8000 Australian children, 38 per cent experienced bullying in the previous 12 months.

Peer Support is a new program at Merriwa Central School in which older students are helping younger students learn how to get along to prevent bullying.

Assistant principal Rebecca West believes empowering students to become supportive of everyone is the key to reducing bullying.

"Research shows us that if we can empower older students to be 'up-standers' instead of bystanders, we can significantly reduce bullying," she said.

Peer Support leader Liana has provided support and given advice to younger students who are having difficulties in the playground.

"The other day a kindergarten kid came up to me upset because someone wasn't playing with them and was taking their friends away," she said.

"I got the kids together to talk about it and we were able to find a solution that worked for everyone."

The Peer Support program will help kids understand bullying and give them strategies and support networks that will enable them to develop resilience.

By **BLAKE TRITTON, JOSEPH WHALEY, BEN KEANE** and **LACHLAN WALKER**

ROTARIANS, community members young and old and the council have united to create a range of facilities for all to use.

The facilities, located on the Golden Highway in Merriwa, include a senior playground, a junior playground, tables and seats, outdoor gym pieces, swings and a sail shade covering.

The projects, carried out over the past three years, have cost \$96,249. Donations from the local community have been crucial in funding the project.

The two biggest donations were from the Rotary club, which donated \$16,926, and NSW Sport and Recreation, through its Participation and Facility Grant, which donated \$17,230. The overall donations received totalled \$79,323.

Rotary project co-ordinator Elaine Sparrow was heavily involved in all aspects of the upgrade.

"The upgrade to the skate park has been an ongoing project for three years, with four separate projects being completed within that time," Mrs Sparrow said.

"The project was started back in June 2010, when Merriwa youth approached Rotary for help as they felt there was a need for out-of-



PROGRESS: Elaine Sparrow, Ben Keane, Lachlan Walker and Liana Byfield. Picture: Tiara Edens-Rosa

school hours leisure areas with play and skate infrastructure.

"The Merriwa Rotary Skate Park Complex now has equipment for two-year-olds to 92-year-olds and it is a place for travelling motorists to stop as it is situated on the Golden Highway," she said.

The half-bowl is the next project

which is on the Upper Hunter Council's three-year draft plan, with a promised \$100,000 if they can procure a grant for the project.

The youth of Merriwa designed the skate park half-bowl and the area is signposted and ready for construction over the next two years.

With excellent collaboration between Upper Hunter Shire Council and local community groups including Rotary, the youth of Merriwa are in good hands.

It has been a remarkable journey, one that has benefited the Council, Rotary, the youth and the community of Merriwa.



SUPPORT: Gaynor Blackadder and Don Beene with the monies raised. Picture: Libbie Towell

Festival funds for volunteer rescue

By **ELLY BLACKADDER, JASMINE HAMMOND** and **LIBBIE TOWELL**

OVER the Queen's birthday long weekend, the annual Merriwa Festival of the Fleeces started with "the running of the sheep" and finished off with fireworks.

Much of the money raised went to community organisations that provide emergency services.

The festival has been a long-time supporter of the Merriwa Volunteer Rescue Association (VRA), regularly making significant donations.

The VRA responds to a variety of incidents, including vehicle and industrial accidents, cave and cliff rescues, body recoveries and animal rescues. It also assists the other NSW emergency services.

Don Beene, secretary of the Merriwa VRA, is thankful for the money provided from the festival.

"Last year the festival donated \$2300, which went towards purchasing new equipment such as light-weight backpack-style resuscitation kits called Oxy Vivas," he said.

It also went towards a four-wheel drive - critical for use in rugged country.

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