

## December 2012 - Double celebration

The Benalla Twins Club had a very special visit from Santa at a recent gathering. While many parenting groups provide support for mums and dads, they often don't understand the pressures of having two young children. That's where the Twins Plus Benalla playgroup comes in. Set up mid 2011, the Twins Club aims to provide support and a sounding board for parents. The group is funded by the Tomorrow:Today Foundation and is based at the Little Giggles facility in Cecily Court, off Nunn Street.



Photo courtesy of Benalla Ensign

## October 2012 - Parent career info night

Research by the Brotherhood of St Laurence shows that about 90% of young people turn to their parent's first for advice and input when it comes to making career shaping decisions. Ironically, the same research shows many parents feel out of touch with the study and work options available today.

To help parents find quality, yet personalised career advice and resources, Tomorrow:Today Foundation is organising a parent career information evening at Benalla Community Health in Coster Street on November 15th. The evening will be attended and supported by local career professionals from FCJ College, Benalla College, CVGT, Goulburn Ovens TAFE and The Centre. Attendance and all resources are free of charge.

Tomorrow:Today's Volunteer Program Coordinator Sabine Smyth said feedback from previous sessions indicates that parents found them helpful. She said parents left with a range of information leaflets and resources as well as a contact sheet for all the presenters.

During the evening, parents are able to 'speed date' the professionals for about ten minutes each and then take home their contact information and printed resources. "The fun and fast moving style is very important for the success of the evening; however it still allows parents to have a 'real' conversation and ask our local career professionals more individual questions," Sabine says. "We also find parents enjoy getting together and comparing notes over supper".

The five key topics covered are: tips on putting together a first resume; how to get work experience and part time work; how to find out about apprenticeships; what can you expect from careers counselling at school; and how to find useful information in the Job Guide (a free careers resource available through schools).

The next free parent career information session is on November 15th from 7pm to 9 pm at Benalla Health. Enrol by phoning the Tomorrow:Today Foundation on 03 57621211 or email [admin@tomorrowtoday.info](mailto:admin@tomorrowtoday.info) . Each session has 25 places only, so book now to secure your place.

## October 2012 - Starting Early

A fun, interactive and free program is up and running for Benalla families with babies and young children.

PEEP (Parents Early Education Partnership) combines songs, rhymes, books and a wide range of activities and discussions, all designed to help children get off to a flying start. The program was designed in the UK where it has been running very successfully for over 15 years.

Several local parents attended the first Baby PEEP group session held last week for children aged 3 to 6 months, including a number of first time parents.

“The parents and babies really loved all the songs and rhymes and enjoyed the activities and discussions,” said PEEP Coordinator, Cath Warnock.

“It’s great for new parents to have opportunities to share ideas or concerns with each other and to learn some new things in a fun and friendly way.”

More parents are invited to join the Babies Group (3 to 6 months) which meets 1.30 pm to 2.30 pm on Wednesdays at Tomorrow:Today Foundation in Cecily Court, Nunn Street, Benalla.

A second PEEP group for children aged 18 months to 2.5 years will also be starting later in October. Enrolments for this group are now being taken.

Anyone interested in finding out more about PEEP can contact the Coordinator, Cath Warnock, Monday to Thursday at Tomorrow:Today Foundation on (03) 5762 1211, drop in to Shop 4 Cecily Court, Nunn Street, Benalla or email [cathwarnock@tomorrowtoday.info](mailto:cathwarnock@tomorrowtoday.info).



## September 2012 - Praise for students' work

For at least six years, the Benalla Cemetery Trust has had a rewarding and close relationship with the VCAL students from Benalla College. A range of wonderful projects have been completed by the students at the cemetery over the years including the repair of children's graves, installation of a water feature, signage for finding graves, historic markers and special memorial garden beds.

According to Benalla Cemetery Trust Secretary Jeff Knight, the students from the Hands On Learning Program at Benalla College have now continued this valued work by installing seats and concreting edging around the graves in the Children's Lawn Cemetery. "We are thrilled to see this work done, and to see these young people from Hands On Learning take interest in improving the children's lawn section has been of great encouragement to the Trust."

Jeff Knight said the eight members of the Benalla Cemetery Trust all agreed that the Hands on Learning Program is doing their school, Benalla College, proud. "The students have done a fine job, and have worked consistently to see the project through to completion. As a result the Trust wishes to sincerely thank the students and the college for continuing this very rewarding partnership." This is remarkable praise but comes as no surprise to The Tomorrow:Today Foundation's Education Benalla Manager Pat Claridge.

"The Tomorrow:Today Foundation brought the program to Benalla and are jointly funding it with Benalla College, because the success of Hands On Learning Programs right across Victoria was so amazing. And it is so effective because it allows young people, who otherwise struggle with school, to do real work in their community and develop a sense of achievement by helping others out." Hands On Learning Coordinator Ed Bishop says that new projects for Benalla Rural City and the Regent Honeyeater Project are in the pipe line. "Since word got around, we are kept pretty busy", Mr Bishop said.

The program was developed by not-for-profit charity Hands On Learning, which works to keep at-risk students in school and whose patron is Governor-General Quentin Bryce.



## August 2012 - Buddies help kids' literacy

A joint partnership between Benalla East Primary School and Tomorrow:Today needs your help with their Reading Buddies Program. Each morning from 9am to 11am community individuals assist students in the Prep, Grade 1 and Grade 2 classrooms with their literacy skills.

Benalla East Principal Rick Martin said the buddies were a treat for the kids. "They offer them such personal attention, and they come into the school like a fresh breath of air. They share their love of reading with the kids in a most infectious way," Mr Martin said.

"Our Reading Buddies are matched with a classroom and teacher: they have introduction training here at the school and then ongoing support with their work," he said. Buddies build relationships with the children they work with.

"They are 'buddied up' with one or two regular students to focus on," Benalla East reading buddy co-ordinator Tannis Brooks said. "We recognise that people are busy, and we try and fit the Reading Buddy Program around them.

"Volunteers can choose how many days they would like to come in and which days are best for them. We really treasure volunteers who can commit to at least two mornings, as this will produce the best results for the kids," he said.

Community members who are interested in becoming a Reading Buddy can phone Sabine Smyth at Tomorrow:Today Foundation on 5762 1211 to register or to obtain more information about the role.



## August 2012 - Building new brains

In a first for Australia, an exciting new early years program is now available in Benalla due to a welcome partnership between the Victorian State Government, Benalla and District Community Taskforce and Tomorrow:Today Foundation.

The Parents Early Education Partnership (PEEP) program began in the United Kingdom in 1995 and has been shown to have significant effects on increasing young children's cognitive abilities, self esteem and social and physical skills. PEEP is based on research evidence that babies' brains are "built not born" and that everything a baby experiences changes and develops their brain.

Because babies start learning right from birth, parents and carers are central to a child's learning and have the greatest influence in the early years.

Two trainers from the UK came to Benalla recently to provide PEEP training for 23 Benalla practitioners and 20 other early years' workers from across the north east. The trainers then visited the Murrindindi Shire to train a further 40 participants as part of the Eildon, Thornton and Alexandra Advancing Country Towns project.

Trainees from Benalla included staff from Benalla Rural City Maternal and Child Health, Family Services and Family Day Care, Benalla Health, Little Giggles and Little Footprints playgroups, Benalla Aquatic Centre, Benalla Library, NE Integrated Primary Mental Health, Waminda Community House and Tomorrow: Today Foundation.

Tomorrow:Today will oversee the rollout of PEEP in Benalla and will work closely with parents and community organisations to make PEEP part of everyday life in Benalla. Cath Warnock has been appointed to co-ordinate the roll-out of PEEP, and she brings a wealth of experience to the project from a background in local government, education and philanthropy.

The Victorian Government's \$9.4 million Advancing Country Towns (ACT) program has provided \$320,000 in funding to pilot the PEEP program in Benalla. The program aims to create new opportunities for education and employment in regional and rural Victoria. Benalla Rural City has received a total of \$810,000 to deliver the Benalla ACT project.

For more details regarding the PEEP roll-out in Benalla, phone Tomorrow:Today Foundation's Education Benalla Program manager Pat Claridge on 5762 1211 or email [patclaridge@tomorrowtoday.info](mailto:patclaridge@tomorrowtoday.info)





## August 2012 - Connection made

A group of 15 Year 9 students recently completed Tomorrow:Today Foundation's 10 week Connect9 program.

Connect9 connects students to a wide range of sports, hobby and career opportunities they might not otherwise have access to, by teaming up the students with mentors from the foundation.

During the 10 week program, mentors and their charges form close relationships as they work together as teams.

Teams do a mini 'Amazing Race', a sporting challenge, a MasterChef session in a commercial kitchen, and even take a glider flight over Benalla. This year's Connect9 program was generously supported by Benalla Aquatic Centre, Goulburn Ovens Insititue of TAFE, the Gliding Club of Victoria, the Benalla secondary schools and Benalla Library.

"Each week you get to do a different activity focused on fun and stepping a little out of your comfort zone," program co-ordinator Sabine Smyth said. "In the end, I think mentors and mentees enjoy the experience equally.

"Because the program is free, it is accessible to all teenagers in Year 9, but we only select those teenagers who show a commitment to stick with the program and put themselves 'out there'. We are very lucky to have a wonderful team of local people who are our mentors," she said.

"Just by showing an interest in their mentee and being their 'buddy', they make a huge difference to young people's lives."

Australian Youth Mentoring Network Research tells us that young people thrive when they feel supported by a mentor. "And our mentees just seem more empowered to have a go, investigate things and try out new experiences," Ms Smyth said.

"It is such an important thing our mentors do for our youth - yet 10 weeks is doable, even for the busiest person."

Tomorrow:Today Foundation will offer Connect9 again in terms two and three next year. Benalla people interested in being mentors can phone Tomorrow:Today Foundation on 5762 1211 for more information.



## July 2012 - Lots of toothy grins

The talk was all about teeth at Little Giggles playgroup when the dentist and dental nurse visited recently. It was a great opportunity for parents to find out about caring for their children's teeth and gums. And the children loved putting on masks to dress up as Dentists!

Little Giggles is a free community playgroup with a varied program of activities and visitors. It runs 9.30am to 12.00pm three days each week: Tuesdays at Waminda plus Wednesdays and Thursdays at Shop 4 Cecily Court, 66 Nunn Street.

For more information phone Leonie at Tomorrow:Today Foundation on 57621211 or email [earlyyears@tomorrowtoday.info](mailto:earlyyears@tomorrowtoday.info)



## June 2012 - Plenty of Fun

There's always something new happening at Little Giggles Playgroup. To celebrate Careers Week the children played with a big box of dress-ups related to caring careers, specifically nurses, doctors, police and teachers.

During May there was a visit from the library to share stories and songs together - parents and carers had just as much fun as the children. And a visit from Benalla Health dieticians, Samantha and Elaine, was a great opportunity to chat about all things food and fussy eating as well as being reassured about the various stages children go through with their eating habits.

Little Giggles Playgroup is free and welcomes all parents and carers with babies and toddlers. Sessions run three times a week at two different places: on Tuesdays at Waminda from 9.30am to 12pm and on Wednesdays and Thursdays at Shop 4, Cecily Crt from 9.30am to 12pm.

For more information contact Leonie on 5762 1211 or [earlyyears@tomorrowtoday.info](mailto:earlyyears@tomorrowtoday.info).



### **May 2012 - College's Programs Awarded**

Benalla College has won a prestigious research prize for excellence in Pathways and Transitions. After finishing runner-up in this category for the past two years, the college has been recognised as the state's premier achiever in catering for the diverse needs of learners, and for seeking ways to further increase the aspirations of parents and the community for young people.

On being presented the award by Higher Education and Skills Minister Peter Hall, Benalla College principal Cathy Pianta paid tribute to the school's staff and community partners. Cathy cited the school's close relationships with Professor Loretta Ciorcelli, with the Tomorrow:Today Foundation, North East Tracks LLEN, Benalla Rural City and other partners.

With partner organisation Tomorrow:Today Foundation, the College established a Hands on Learning Program, and was followed quickly by several other schools in the north east. In this program, small groups of students work with a teacher and professional tradesperson, learning skills and undertaking a number of local and wider community projects.

Benalla College's successful Connect Girls Program also follows a formula of personalised learning and pathways.

### **May 2012: Parents Can Get Career Advice**

Parents of teenagers still hold the biggest sway when it comes to providing career advice, according to recent studies by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Surveys showed that close to 95 per cent of Year 9 and 10 students said they valued their parents advice most when it came to career decisions, while only 20 per cent of all parents surveyed felt they had the necessary knowledge to give good career advice.

Because it is a long time for most parents since they left school, studied or looked for work, they feel understandably out of touch. A free career information session for parents organised by the Tomorrow:Today Foundation and sponsored by The Centre Community College will bring together local career experts from both Benalla secondary schools, Goulburn Ovens TAFE and CVGT to provide parents with some basic, helpful advice so that they can better assist their children with career decisions.

The session still has some places left but parents are encouraged to enrol quickly as



numbers are limited. The session is at the Ray Sweeney Centre, Benalla Health, Coster St on Tuesday 29 May from 7pm - 9pm.



### **May 2012: Helping Children to Develop**

"Mother Goose" is a playgroup experience for parents and young children that focuses on interactive rhymes, stories and songs. The program is currently delivered on Mondays and Tuesdays by staff from Benalla Health and Benalla Rural City, assisted by a small number of volunteers.

Volunteer at the current "Mother Goose" sessions, Joy Shirley, has been delivering the program for almost two years. "I love to see the parents and children having fun together. And the songs and rhymes are great to sing to my own grandchildren," Mrs Shirley said.

Singing songs, reciting nursery rhymes and listening to stories play an important role in developing children's speech, language and attention skills according to Benalla Health speech therapist Sally Matheson. "A child's speech and language skills have a big effect on whether they are ready to learn when they start school," Ms Matheson said.

The Tomorrow:Today Foundation, in partnership with Benalla Rural City and Benalla Health, is seeking to expand the program so more families can attend. "It is Tomorrow:Today's strong view that every child in Benalla and district should be able to start school ready to learn," Ms Claridge said. "Having fun by sharing a story and a song with mum and dad, or grandma and granddad, is priceless. "Trained volunteers can help us expand the program to more and more families."

### **May 2012: Plenty of Free Fun**

Messy play activities are one of the many things families love about Little Giggles playgroups. Families attend playgroup for lots of reasons, according to Tomorrow:Today Foundation early years specialist Leonie Daniel.

"It gives children an opportunity for great social interactions, to learn and play and to use different toys from home," Leonie said. "And parents enjoy playgroup because it is a time to get out of the house, have an adult conversation, give and get support and understand a bit more about their child's development."

Tomorrow:Today's Little Giggles free playgroup runs three times a week at two locations. Activities include painting, drawing, playdough, blocks, puzzles, books, dramatic play (dress-ups and role play) cars, trucks and many other toys and games.

Young children engage with others in a controlled setting and families can share ideas and support each other. Everyone is welcome.



### **April 2012: Helpers Sought**

The Tomorrow:Today Foundation is seeking Benalla residents interested in spending one to four mornings a week from 9am to 11am assisting young readers with their literacy development. Volunteers will be reading buddies for Benalla East Primary School children as part of the Education Benalla program.

Benalla East Primary School principal Rick Martin said reading buddies would be greeted with a warm welcome and lots of support. "Our reading buddies will be matched with a classroom and teacher: they will have induction training here at the school and then ongoing support with their work," he said.

### **February 2012: Renowned Child Educator Visits Little Giggles Playgroup**

The Tomorrow:Today Foundation was fortunate recently to receive a visit from Kathleen Warren, writer and early childhood consultant to the Wiggles. Kathleen who is a Doctor of Education and has a Master of Arts (Hons) taught two of the Wiggles team while lecturing at University. As well as being an advisor to the very popular group, Kathleen has worked as a consultant with Asia Disney, and has worked extensively with young children and early childhood educators in Australia and many other countries.

Kathleen gave a big tick to the Little Giggles program plan and had some great ideas about expanding the program activities even further. For more information on Little Giggles playgroups visit the Tomorrow Today website or call Leonie on 57621211.

### **February 2012: Mentors Needed**

Connect9 is a program just for Benalla's teenagers, with the focus on fun, community connection, career orientation and motivating young people to 'have a go'. The program targets youth aged 14 to 15 and in Year 9. You can make a huge impact on a young person's life by supporting them throughout this

10-week program as their mentor.

Mentors are matched to a young person and then participate as their 'buddy' for the duration of the program.

Mentors can choose to take part in either the term two or term three program or both.

Dates and times for Connect9 Programs in 2012:

- Term two: Tuesday, 17 April to Sunday, 17 June.
- Term three: Tuesday, 17 July to Sunday, 15 September.