

December 2013 - New path to success

Article by Monique Freer, Benalla Ensign

Families at Benalla P-12 College will benefit from \$130,000 of funding across the next two years which will help strengthen the approach to student career pathways.

The Victoria Government funding will launch "Shared aspirations - family, school, community", a pilot program that will provide an intensive personalised approach to career pathways planning in Year 9 and will track vulnerable students in Year 10 and beyond.

"This is going to allow us to really work with families around talking about careers, talking about how they can access certain pathways to the future - and our main goal is that our Year 9s stay on and finish Year 12 and they can see the way into either university or a job that suits their skills and their interests," Benalla P-12 College principal Barbara O'Brien said. "It's about keeping kids at school and keeping them interested and engaged," Ms O'Brien said.

Benalla P-12 College program co-ordinator Sue Oakley said the successful Connect Girls and Hands On Learning programs launched at the school had given co-ordinators an understanding of how to better engage students and their families.

"We're taking some of the things we used in the Connect Girls program that we know have worked really well to engage students and improve their aspirations, and really the main focus of the program is improving the aspirations of not just the student but also their family," Ms Oakley said.

During the program a 'portfolio of growth' will be developed for each student, recording aspirations, goals, skills, achievements and strategies to support Year 12 completion. Ms Oakley said this would be shared with parents, and a career action plan would be expanded to identify barriers to attendance and engagement.

"A lot of schools don't do a lot of that work until they're a little bit older, but we know that Year 9 is an absolutely crucial time to start all of this," she said.

The program was influenced by learnings from staff's recent study trip to America, where they visited leading educational facilities in Boston and New York. "The major focus we had in Boston was the Parent University program, and what they're saying is to identify the needs of parents first, and that helps them become more involved in the school community which means their child gets engaged and you can have those conversations early about pathways," Ms Oakley said.

The program will run with the support of Tomorrow:Today Foundation and NE Tracks Local Learning and Education Network, which will provide personnel and host programs for parents.

Benalla P-12 College was one of 33 Victorian schools that shared in \$2.45 million of second round funding from the government's \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund. It was one of few regional schools to receive funding in both rounds, having been awarded \$70,000 over two years in 2011 for the ConnectGirls program.

"This money will help regional schools to partner with other educational organisations, to offer more extensive course options, develop mentorship programs and to work more closely with parents," Victorian education Minister Martin Dixon said. "In addition to improving retention rates, the Coalition Government believes these programs will improve student wellbeing and that better tailored education programs will lead more students to consider

further education and training after completing Year 12."

December 2013 - Camp helps pathways

A new camp for Benalla P-12 College Year 10 students will help them with their future pathways.

The three day camp 'Discover your Future' was held in Melbourne and students visited tertiary institutions and experienced city life. They attended Swinburne University and went on a campus tour, completed a multimedia workshop and visited student accommodation.

At Victoria University students attended a lecture focused on tertiary pathways and their options, as well as a campus tour. The group also visited William Angliss Institute where they experienced a formal dinner and were able to view the chefs at work.

As part of the camp students had to learn how to confidently use public transport to navigate their way around Melbourne. Two Year 10 students, Olivia Cooney and Kaitlin Kaine, took on the role of event managers and spent months creating a program that met the needs of all Year 10 students.

The camp was in partnership with the Tomorrow:Today Foundation - Transition to Tertiary Education.

November 2013 - Program kicks goals

Article by Robyn Antanovskij, Benalla Ensign

A national study conducted in 2007 listed Benalla as one of the most socially disadvantaged regions in Victoria. This was the springboard for the Education Benalla Program; a long-term project which is already improving outcomes for Benalla's young people.

As reported in the Ensign, the program was listed as one of the Top 50 Philanthropic Gifts of All Time.

Education Benalla Program manager Pat Claridge said the program was just three years into its planned decade of work, but the results so far had been encouraging. A University of Melbourne review of the program in 2012 concluded that it was "making impressive progress towards achieving its long-term aims." The major aims of the program is to prepare young children for school, raising family and community educational expectations, and improving student literacy, numeracy and wellbeing.

"It's about raising education levels for all kids," Ms Claridge said.

Education Benalla is the largest project run by the Tomorrow:Today Foundation, and chair Sally Gamble said education was multi-faceted. "School is only one aspect of education," Ms Gamble said. "School, family and community are all crucial to educational outcomes."

Ms Claridge said the range of activities that made up the program were widely varied and involved many community organisations beyond just schools.

"For very young children, there is access to a free playgroup called 'Little Giggles' as well as volunteer reading buddies," Ms Claridge said. "They're great, the volunteers."

There is also the Parents Early Education Partnership program where parents are taught about the role they can play in their young child's education. "Parents learn how to help their kids learn," Ms Claridge said.

Specially designed for Year 9 students is the Connect9 program and female-oriented ConnectGirls program. "Each student is matched with a volunteer mentor," Ms Gamble said. "They are carefully matched according to interests."

Mentors then help the students to explore new activities which could be anything from pottery to bushwalking.

Another successful program is Hands on Learning, where students spend one day out of each school week engaged in practical community projects, such as installing seating in the cemetery.

"Taking part in the Hands on Learning program really reflects in their classroom behaviour," Ms Claridge said. "For some of them, it's the first time they've done well at something," Ms Gamble said. "They can finally see some purpose."

Education Benalla also provides free bus trips for VCE students to visit four universities in Melbourne. "They get to see how it all works and the accommodation they might stay in if they went there," Ms Gamble said.

The University of Melbourne report showed that due to Education Benalla there was a growing recognition of the link between career fulfilment and educational attainment.

Education Benalla will undergo a full-scale review in 2015 to direct the future course of the program.



October 2013 - Gift recognised

Benalla is in the national spotlight with the announcement last week in Melbourne of the “Top 50 Philanthropic Gifts of All Time”.

Tomorrow:Today Foundation’s Education Benalla Program, which works in partnership across agencies, community groups, schools and businesses to assist families and children from birth to age 25, has been rated in the distinguished list.

Resulting from a public nomination process, the ‘Top 50’ celebrates Australia’s most significant philanthropic achievements from the 1800’s until today.

Chair of Tomorrow:Today Foundation, Sally Gamble, said that it was a great honour to be included in such a distinguished list. “The Education Benalla Program has remarkable partnerships throughout the community that are certainly bringing about results,” says Ms. Gamble.

The list was compiled by a working group that included the Myer Family Company, The Myer Foundation and Sidney Myer Fund, Pro Bono Australia, Philanthropy Australia and the Asia-Pacific Centre for Social Investment and Philanthropy at Swinburne University of Technology. The working group selected the Top 50 from well over 700 nominations received.

Commenting on the Education Benalla Program’s inclusion in the Top 50, Louise Walsh, CEO, Philanthropy Australia, said: This program is helping young people within the local community to engage more actively in their education, and helping them aspire to achieve. In three-short years the Education Benalla Program has had a significant impact on this rural community, helping to shape and change the lives of children and their families.”

The Education Benalla Program is recognised in the award along with the gifts made in 2009 to help establish the Program by the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal’s Rural Education Program, together with the R E Ross Trust and The Yulgilbar Foundation.

Voting is open for only a few short days to identify the Top 10 gifts. Come on Benalla; vote now on-line! Public voting closes at 5pm on Monday 28th October.



Photo: Courtesy of Benalla Ensign

October 2013 - Program prepares youth for work

Ten keen youths celebrated their graduation from a work readiness training program last week.

The event was the culmination of four of after-school training at NE Tracks LLEN that involved presentations by 11 Benalla business people.

Participants learned about employers' expectations, tasks given to part-time workers, OH&S issues, on the job training and having a positive attitude.

NE Tracks LLEN project officer Louise Wright said a highlight of the program was the mock interviews given by employers. "While it is nerve-wracking for those who have never done an interview, all the students give the experience a top score in their evaluations," Ms Wright said.

Ms Wright said research of Australian young people found that those who had paid part-time work while at school developed skills that made them more likely to be employed later on. "A major emphasis of the project is to encourage the young people to continue their school studies and to plan their future directions," she said.

Ms Wright said 27 Benalla and district students had completed work readiness training with the Paid Part-Time Work Project.

The project is supported by Tomorrow:Today Foundation, Advancing Country Towns, Benalla Rural City Council and Worktrainers.

Ms Wright said many former graduates of the program had part-time jobs or school-based traineeships. She said the latest graduates were work-hungry and NE Tracks LLEN staff were keen to hear from employers who had part-time positions available in Benalla.

Anyone seeking part-time employees should phone Thomas Greene or Louise Wright at NE Tracks LLEN on 5762 7777.



September 2013 - Connecting with nature

Participants in the Connect9 program were recently treated to a wonderful walk in the Warby Ranges with Benalla Bushwalking Club.

Club secretary John Boehm said it was thrilled to offer the bushwalking experience to the Connect9 participants.

"We think that Connect9 is a terrific mentoring program. The young people who came on the Warby walk with us were a delight to lead."

The group had spectacular weather and stunning views over the Ovens and King Valleys on 'The Friends' circuit walk.

The Connect9 participants enthusiastically enjoyed the wildflowers that are in full bloom, with wattles of all shapes and sizes brightening the path, green hood orchids shyly peeping through and majestic grass trees on all sides.

The 10-week Connect9 program is run by Tomorrow:Today Foundation and sees community mentors paired with Year 9 students from Benalla P-12 College and FCJ College. During the first four weeks of the program participants undertake weekly activities which have included going to the YMCA, Library, working with a life coach and enjoying a meal that they prepared with their mentors at the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen at Benalla P-12's Waller St campus.

After four weeks of scheduled activities, mentors and students plan their next five sessions independently. Participants then choose activities that are linked in with their interests, hobbies and career options.

The program will conclude on Saturday, September 21 when the young people will enjoy the excitement of a glider flight followed by a celebratory lunch with their families and mentors.



August 2013 - National recognition

Article by Monique Freer, Benalla Ensign

Benalla's Parents Early Education Partnership program has been recognised by the National party as a leader in its field.

Two advisors for Deputy Premier of Victoria and Leader of the Nationals Peter Ryan travelled to Benalla earlier this month to see Tomorrow:Today Foundation's PEEP program in action.

"It's wonderful because it gets recognition to the fact that Benalla is staging a whole of community approach to committing to our children to learn," Tomorrow:Today Foundation Education Benalla Program manager Pat Claridge said.

"It is a prime example of what a community can do when it gets together."

Mr Ryan's advisors came at the invitation of Member for Benalla Bill Sykes, who said the visit was also to begin formulating policies for the next state election.

"(The visit) was also to look at broader aspects of Tomorrow:Today's activities and start to formulate our policies going into the next election," Dr Sykes said.

"Tomorrow:Today had come to us wanting to talk with government and it dovetailed because I had been singing the praises of, in particular, Tomorrow:Today as part of an example of the community recognising that it has some issues we need to address - and we're doing it as a community."

"As a government we've been able to come in and help and it's about what else we can do in the future."

PEEP is run with support from the Advancing Country Towns initiative, for babies through to pre-schoolers. The program supports parents as their child's first teacher and includes songs, rhymes, books, fun activities and the opportunity for parents to share their stories and learn more about how to support their child's development.

For information on free playgroups or the PEEP program, contact Cath Warnock, Monday to Thursday at Tomorrow:Today Foundation on (03) 5762 1211, drop in to Shop 4 Cecily Court, Nunn St, Benalla or email cathwarnock@tomorrowtoday.info.



Photo: Courtesy of Benalla Ensign

July 2013 - Cubby project completed

Benalla P-12 College students from the VET Building and Construction class and the Hands-On Learning Program have been busy working on a community project in conjunction with Tomorrow:Today Foundation and Waminda Community House.

The VET students are building a cubby house as a practical experience and competency for their module work while the HOL students are painting it. Waminda Community House received a grant from Tomorrow:Today Foundation to purchase the cubby and transport it to Waminda. The Benalla P-12 College Hands-On Learning team will assist with installing the cubby and refurbishing the children's sandpit in the play area.

HOL teacher Peter Janas thanked Mitre 10 for the paint that was donated.

School principal Barbara O'Brien said she was proud of the students who worked collaboratively on the project. "They have shown a real passion in all areas from the initial construction of the cubby house to the final stages of decorating it," Ms O'Brien said. "Benalla P-12 College is keen to assist on community projects and we welcome organisations to contact us to assist with other community projects."

July 2013 - Program to kick off

An exciting new program for families with young children is set to get underway at Benalla P-12 College Waller St campus.

A new Parents Early Education Partnership group will be open to all Benalla families with children from birth to pre-school age.

PEEP supports parents as their child's first and most important teacher by providing opportunities for parents and children to sing, read and do activities together.

"We are excited about partnering with Benalla P-12 College to deliver PEEP at the school," said Tomorrow:Today Foundation PEEP Coordinator Cath Warnock said.

"It means the program will be more accessible to families in the local area, including those who already have older children at the school. And we will have access to some of the great facilities at the school.

Principal Heather Leary is also excited about having the program on site at the Waller St Campus.

"PEEP is a very welcoming and enjoyable way for parents and carers to set the stage for their children's learning," she said. "It's all about providing opportunities for children and families to grow and learn together."

The "Little Explorers" PEEP sessions begin on July 25, and will meet on Thursday afternoons from 2.10pm to 3.10pm. The program is free to all Benalla and district families and no registration is necessary.

Other PEEP groups currently offered at Cecily Court (off Nunn Street) include Baby PEEP, Little Ones PEEP (for children aged nine to 18 months), PEEP for Twos/Threes and a Transition to School PEEP program.

Benalla's PEEP program is a joint initiative by the Tomorrow:Today Foundation, Benalla Rural City Council and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

For more information about any of the PEEP groups, please contact Cath Warnock at Tomorrow:Today Foundation on (03) 57 62 1211, visit Shop 4 Cecily Court, Nunn St, Benalla or email cathwarnock@tomorrowtoday.info.



July 2013 - Taking a PEEP at the gallery

Families with babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers enjoyed a fun session at Benalla Art Gallery last week.

The 'PEEP, Playgroup and Primates' session made the most of the Gallery's "Monkey Grip" exhibition with an ape-themed story and craft activities, a guided tour of the exhibition and a scrumptious morning tea.

"It was a great chance to hold a session in a different local venue and, for some families, it was their very first visit to the Gallery," said Tomorrow:Today's PEEP Coordinator, Cath Warnock.

"Everyone enjoyed seeing the apes close up and just being in a new and exciting place was a big hit with the children. Families from PEEP and Playgroup programs attended so it was great to have everyone together."

Tomorrow:Today Foundation offers free playgroups three mornings a week for families with children aged 0 to 5. Tomorrow:Today also runs the PEEP (Parents Early Education Partnership) program for babies through to preschoolers with support from the Advancing Country Towns initiative. PEEP supports parents as their child's first (and most important) teacher and includes songs, rhymes, books, fun activities and the opportunity for parents to share their stories and learn more about how to support their child's development.

For information on our free playgroups or the PEEP program, contact 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.



July 2013 - Exciting after-school activities

It was sensational weather for gliding when 10 Year 9 students soared above Benalla to mark the successful conclusion of this year's term three Connect9 community mentoring program.

To help open young minds to new ideas, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, with the support of community mentors, offers Year 9 students the opportunity for free participation in fantastic after-school activities once a week, over one school term (10 weeks).

This year's Connect9 program was also enthusiastically supported by the Benalla Aquatic Centre, Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE, the Gliding Club of Victoria, Benalla secondary schools and Benalla Library.

Because the program is free, it is accessible to all teenagers and not just those able to cope with the usual cost of extracurricular activities.

Education Benalla volunteer programs co-ordinator Sabine Smyth said the program connected students to a wide range of activities and organisations in Benalla.

"We have called the program 'Connect9' - because it is all about connecting Year 9 students to a wide range of sports, hobby, leisure and employment opportunities in and around Benalla."

"Each week a different 'come try' activity is undertaken," Ms Smyth said.

Teenagers and their mentors chose from a range of options to design a weekly program that matched each Connect9 participant's own interests.

This time young people chose to try out archery at 15 Mile Creek, safely fire pistols at Benalla Pistol Club, complete the on-line Career Voyager, do in-door rock-climbing at Venturers, visit Benalla Camera Club, make a piece of pottery with the Broken River Potters, go for a bushwalk in the Warby Ranges with Benalla Bushwalking Club and perform music at

the Open Mic arranged by LifeYouth Group.

Families of current Year 8 students can express interest in Connect9 for 2014 by contacting Tomorrow:Today Foundation on 5762 1211.



June 2013 - New early education group to start

Families with children aged from nine to 18 months old are invited to join a new Parents Early Education Partnership group starting in mid-July.

PEEP combines songs, rhymes, books and a wide range of fun activities, all designed to help children get off to a great start. Parents have the opportunity to share stories and learn more about how to support their child's development.

"Our first baby PEEP group of children are now turning one and becoming very mobile," PEEP co-ordinator Cath Warnock said.

"The families love coming each week, so our program is moving forward with them as they enter this next exciting phase of their lives."

The 'Little Ones' group will include topics such as movement, numbers, playing and learning. New families are invited to join in the fun.

Tomorrow:Today Foundation also hosts PEEP sessions for babies, two to three year olds and a multi-age group for families with children up to five years old.

Anyone interested in finding out more about 'Little Ones' PEEP or other PEEP groups can contact Cath Warnock, Monday to Thursday at Tomorrow:Today Foundation on 5762 1211, drop in to Shop 4 Cecily Court, Nunn St, Benalla or email cathwarnock@tomorrowtoday.info.

June 2013 - Students visit universities

Sixty-eight Year 11 and 12 students from Benalla P-12 College and FCJ College travelled to Melbourne on Wednesday 5 June, for a tour of Melbourne's universities.

One group visited University of Melbourne and Latrobe University, while the other group travelled to Monash University and Deakin University.

The day gave Benalla's secondary students an understanding of Melbourne-based university options for country students, with clear information about scholarships, the application process and accommodation.

One student commented on how grateful they were to have the opportunity to look inside a university, while other positive student feedback included:

"Today gave me an insight into uni life; eating, living and learning."

"It showed me there are ways to afford to go to uni."

"I liked today because I was able to understand the different feel and culture of each Uni."

"Today has shown me that although the Melbourne campus was enjoyable, I feel that I am a country person who would fit in better at a rural campus."

Benalla P-12 College Barkly St Campus Careers' co-ordinator Ann Forster said the trip was preferable to the normal Open Days.

"Visiting the universities in operational mode was very good for our students. It was a lot more realistic as a first impression," Ms Forster said.

Tomorrow:Today Foundation initiated the day and funded the buses as part of its Education Benalla Program.

The trip was organised through a partnership between Tomorrow:Today Foundation and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and students were accompanied by teaching staff from both schools and a representative from Tomorrow:Today Foundation.

"We are keen to see Benalla's young people aspiring to go on to tertiary education or training," Tomorrow:Today Foundation volunteer co-ordinator Sabine Smyth said.

"Understanding more about the tertiary options and available support is a really important first step."



June 2013 - Careers Explored

With the theme of students aiming high, a successful Benalla Careers Day was held on Thursday, May 23.

Now in its fifth year, the day saw 150 Year 10 students from Benalla P-12 College and FCJ College gather at BPACC and GOTAFE Benalla and was reported by students to be a very positive experience.

NE Tracks Local Learning and Employment Network executive officer Thomas Greene said the day was designed to be active, fun, engaging and informative.

"We focus on education, training and employment opportunities, both local and further afield, and also support students to develop an apprenticeship, traineeship, TAFE or university pathway," Mr Green said.

This year saw the new activity 'career speed dating' incorporated into the program, which involved close to 20 local professionals including members of Benalla Police Station, plumbers, builders, nurses and engineers.

Each professional spoke to small groups of students for 15 minutes, and students in turn were exposed to a wider range of careers than they would normally consider, opening their eyes to new possibilities.

Benalla Careers Day co-ordinator Sabine Smyth said the workshops and activities encouraged students to enjoy the process of finding their preferred career path.

"Young people have so much to look forward to as they work to complete six years of secondary school and embark on the next stage in their lives," Ms Smyth said.

Benalla Careers Day is the result of much work by a planning committee and sponsors involving event organiser NE Tracks LLEN, Benalla P-12 College, FCJ College, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, The Centre for Continuing Education, GOTAFE and Benalla Rural City.



May 2013 - Cheers to a terrific meal

Participants in the Connect9 program were treated to a Masterchef cooking lesson at GOTAFE last week as part of the mentoring program's weekly activities.

Mentors and mentees prepared a two-course meal for nearly 30 people under the guidance of chef Jane Wall, and enjoyed each other's company when they sat down to eat their creations together.

L2P Benalla program co-ordinator Vivien Ives, and Tina McCormack from Goulburn Ovens TAFE spoke briefly to the mentors and mentees about the learner driver program and the Career Voyager activity offered through GOTAFE, which aim to support teenagers to get on the roads and enter the workforce.

The 10-week Connect9 program is run by the Tomorrow:Today Foundation and sees mentors paired with Year 9 students and participate in weekly activities ranging from a sport session to an 'Amazing Race' at the Benalla Library.

After four weeks of scheduled activities, mentors and mentees plan their next five sessions independently, and Tomorrow:Today Foundation's Sabine Smyth said the idea was for the participants to choose activities that linked in with their interests and hobbies.

The final week of this group's program will be held in June and will see all participants come together at the gliding club to reflect on their time in the program.



Photo: Courtesy of Benalla Ensign

April 2013 - Program Awarded

Tomorrow:Today Foundation's Sabine Smyth is excited about the organisation being the first to gain statewide accreditation for its popular mentoring program.

The Connect9 Program involves one to one mentoring for Year 9 students and has proven popular since its inception in 2011.

Mrs Smyth said that, after several months of hard work and due process, the foundation had been awarded accreditation by the Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance(VYMA). Further to this, Tomorrow:Today Foundation's successful Quality Assurance Project will be used as a template for other organisations.

VYMA co-ordinator Clare Waldron said she was impressed with those involved with the program. "The Connect 9 program may be small, but the Tomorrow:Today Foundation have made tremendous efforts to ensure their program is of the highest quality," Ms Waldron said. "The Tomorrow:Today Foundation have been the forerunners in the Quality Assurance Project run by the VYMA. "I was impressed by the professionalism of the staff and their solid understanding the complex issues faced in the mentoring sector.

"In recognition of their efforts the Tomorrow:Today Foundation have been the first organisation in Victoria to become a VYMA Quality Member."

Mrs Smyth said Connect9 was available to Year 9 students and was a "health and wellbeing program" aimed at increasing self-esteem and a focus on the future. "It's a bit of a turning point for young people at that age; they can be stressed figuring out what they are going to do with their future," Mrs Smyth said. "It helps with their career and life direction.

"The difference with our program is that it is short, just 10 weeks. But it works."

Mrs Smyth said the program involved connecting 15 Year 9 Students with knowledgeable local adults. As a group, the participants discuss career and life goals and are then assisted in creating individual plans for their time in the program. The participants will try a range of new activities including trying a new sport, investigating a new hobby, looking into volunteering and finding out what career might suit them in them in future.

For further information, contact Sabine Smyth at Tomorrow:Today Foundation on 5762 1211.



Photo: Courtesy of Benalla Ensign

March 2013 - Program for Year 9s

Do you know a Benalla Year 9 student who would benefit from taking part in Connect9?

An initiative of the Tomorrow:Today Foundation, Connect9 is currently taking enrolments for the Term 2 and Term 3 programs.

Connect9 involves 10 after-school activities over 10 weeks, in small groups or one-on-one with a community mentor who has been specially teamed up with each young person.

Participants get to do a mini Amazing Race, a sporting challenge, a MasterChef Session in a commercial kitchen, complete some life and career planning and as a grand finale get a free glider flight over Benalla.

"I encourage parents of teenagers in Year 9 to talk to their son or daughter about participating in this fun and free program. We have had fabulous results for the students that have participated in past years," Tomorrow:Today Volunteer Coordinator Sabine Smyth said.

"Students who especially benefit are those with fewer connections to the Benalla community, those who are a bit unsure about what they might do after school, and those who are trying to work out their career direction."

"We are very lucky to have a wonderful team of local people who are our mentors. They empower our mentees to have a go, investigate things and try out new experiences," Ms Smyth said.

"Connect9 is rather unique because it is run by Benalla people for Benalla's teenagers."

The Term 2 program will run from April 16 to June 22, and the Term 3 program from July 16 to September 4. For more details visit www.tomorrowtoday.com.au or phone 5762 1211.



March 2013 - Lots of fun to bear

Songs, stories, rhymes and fun were the order of the day for the first multi-age Parents Early Education Partnership (PEEP) session in Benalla on Thursday March 7. PEEP stands for Parents Early Education Partnership and it's about families learning together through talking, singing and doing things together.

The theme for the day was bears so there were songs about bears, rhymes about bears, and of course the classic bear story "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." The children fed some cardboard bears with porridge, they coloured in bears and did bear puzzles. They put bears to bed, acted out the story with bear puppets and tried filling different size bear bowls with pasta. Ten children took part with their families and had a great time.

Multi-age PEEP is open to all families with children from birth to school age. It will be held at Waminda Community House every Thursday commencing at 1.30pm. The session goes for one hour, but families are welcome to stay on and have a cuppa together afterwards while the children enjoy a healthy afternoon tea of fruit and milk. You don't have to register, just drop in.

PEEP is coordinated in Benalla by the Tomorrow:Today Foundation and is supported by the family liaison workers from Benalla Rural City Council and funding from the Advancing Country Towns Project.

For more information, parents can phone Cath Warnock at Tomorrow:Today Foundation on 03 57621211.

February 2013 - Care to be a mentor?

The Tomorrow:Today Foundation is running two Connect9 mentoring programs in 2013 and is seeking a number of mentors.

Are you available to mentor a 15 year old in Connect9 during either or both term two (April 16 to June 22) and term three (July 16 to September 4)? If so, let Tomorrow:Today know.

As always, the program begins with three fun group sessions and a career orientation planning session, during which mentors and mentees plan out the rest of their time.

This year there are extra optional group activities for the final six weeks of the program: Fitness @ YMCA, cooking a la Master Chef, race around the library, pottery, archery, bushwalking, meditation/relaxation, Venturers, open mic and Career Voyager are all again on the Connect9 program.

Tomorrow:Today will conduct two mentor briefing sessions which all prospective mentors are requested to attend: on Tuesday, March 12 and 19 from 6.30pm to 8pm. Before each program begins, there will be a cheese and wine briefing session so mentors for the first program can meet each other. This will take place on Tuesday, April 9, from 6pm to 7pm at the Tomorrow:Today Foundation offices.

If you are interested in being a mentor, please enrol for the induction sessions by phoning 5762 1211. Only new mentors need to complete a registration form.

January 2013 - Positive feedback

Benalla's very first 'Great Start to School PEEP' (Parents Early Education Partnership) Program has been given the thumbs up from local families with pre-schoolers.

Participating parent Sherie Madden said she and her four year old daughter Elisha had been going since the program started back in October. "I've come along to all the sessions," Ms Madden said. "I find it really helpful just talking to other mums with young kids, to share ideas about what works and what doesn't. It is also great for the kids, because they get to interact with other kids prior to the big day (their first day of primary school)."

Fifteen families are participating in a five session program run by the Tomorrow:Today Foundation that supports parents to help their children get off to a good start. Each session focuses on a different aspect of school readiness, including helping children become ready to learn and socialise, finding ways to help them to physically and emotionally prepare for the big day, helping them become more independent and setting up routines and practices to ensure a smooth start to each school day.

PEEP Coordinator, Cath Warnock, said the key to the success of the program has been the willingness of the parents to share their knowledge, expertise, ideas and concerns.

"There's been so much experience and support in the room. The parents have been great at coming up with ideas to help each other through this important phase in their child's life - and the activities have been a lot of fun for the children."

Great Start to School is one activity of the PEEP program, which is being coordinated in Benalla by the Tomorrow:Today Foundation through a partnership with Benalla Rural City Council and the Victorian State Government.

The program recognises that parents and carers are central to a child's learning and they have the greatest influence in the early years. There are a range of activities including groups for babies and toddlers and pre-schoolers. Parents with babies or young children are invited to register for any one of a number of facilitated, fun early years group sessions held weekly at Tomorrow:Today in Cecily Court and at Waminda Community House.

"We hope that grandparents, friends and families will help spread the word to parents that the PEEP program has something to offer all young families in Benalla Rural City," Ms Warnock said.

Phone Ms Warnock at Tomorrow:Today Foundation on 5762 1211, drop in to Shop 4 Cecily Court, Nunn Street, Benalla or email cathwarnock@tomorrowtoday.info.



Photo courtesy of Benalla Ensign

January 2013 - Reading buddies honoured

Volunteer 'Reading Buddies' from Benalla East Primary School had a lovely surprise before Christmas. They were presented with personal thank you letters from their little buddies for helping to improve their literacy skills. The volunteers were officially recognised and thanked at a celebratory lunch at Benalla Art Gallery Cafe by Tomorrow:Today Foundation's Education Benalla Program Manager Pat Claridge, Benalla East Primary School Principal Rick Martin and literacy and volunteer support staff.

The 'Reading Buddy Program' for Prep and Grade 1 and 2 students is a first for Benalla. The program provides early intervention where students are struggling with reading and writing. "We aim to help the students before they fall behind" said Principal Rick Martin. "Early evaluation of the program indicates very encouraging improvements in the student's literacy levels as well as their confidence in the classroom."

Reading Buddies come to the school at regular times each week, spending quality reading, writing and listening time with their young charges. Every Reading Buddy is matched to just one student, so the attention is very personal.

Tannis Brooks, coordinator of the program for Benalla East comments that the personal connection between adult volunteer and student is as valuable as the academic support they offer. "The children look forward to the days their Reading Buddies come. They establish a special relationship."

Tomorrow:Today Foundation is looking to expand the program to all Benalla Primary Schools in 2012. Volunteer Coordinator Sabine Smyth revealed that up to twenty more "Reading Buddies need to be recruited. "So if anyone has written on their list of New Year's resolutions that they want to get more involved in volunteering, we would love to hear from them," said Sabine.

Sabine can be contacted at the Tomorrow:Today Foundation on 03 57621211.

