



The Road

DAMASCUS COLLEGE

Spring 2024

FRONT COVER

BROKEN HILL TO BALLARAT (B2B)

Cover: Our cover features a captivating image of the Damascus College Sustainable Racing Team (SRT) on a road in the stunning Australian Outback near Broken Hill, captured during their preparations for the ambitious B2B journey. This incredible 1085km adventure highlights the team's unwavering dedication to sustainability and their commitment to making a positive impact on the world. With a warm welcome back and a successful fundraising effort for cancer research, the team's journey is a testament to resilience, teamwork, and the power of collective action. For the full story of their inspiring journey and the celebration event, turn to page 5.

Contributions to The Road can be sent to:
DAMASCUS COLLEGE
Alumni & Development Office
1412 Geelong Road, Mt Clear VIC 3350
connecting@damascus.vic.edu.au

Editor and Writer: Korina Hegert, Alumni & Development Officer

Design and Writer: Jenny Phillips
Marketing & Design Officer

Writer: Michelle Veldhuis, Archivist

Printer: Revolution Print

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PRINCIPAL'S WELCOME

STEVEN MIFSUD

Welcome to the Spring edition.

Today, I had the joy of celebrating Damascus Day, a special occasion when we gather as a community to celebrate and give thanks for who we are, where we have come from, and where we are heading as people of Christ. We share a rich legacy and tapestry of growth, beautifully woven by the many women, men, religious, and parishioners who have come before us in our 140+ year history. We are people on a constant journey of conversion, learning to see and recognise our God in a world that needs love, care, and grace.

Each day, I am grateful for the young people and the many staff who come to our College to work with us, challenge us, and help establish and build a new Kingdom of God. Our faith is one that constantly evolves, enriched by our partnerships, and strengthened by all members of our community. I am always reminded that our young people are our future; they are the change agents and carriers of our story. It is through open listening and respectful dialogue that we come to understand one another. This year, our students have been graciously led by Paris Govan, Lucas Wells, and SRC president Caleb Smith. Each leader has brought their individual skills, talents, and spirit to their leadership role, modelling how to live by the light of Christ.

As members of Damascus, we are called to contribute to the fabric of our College, to embed our tapestry, and to shape a new image and way of being. Our values need to be harnessed and challenged to shape our school, demonstrating how we can live and grow alongside people from all walks of life, walking with our God and with one another.

This year, more than ever before, we must model to the people of Ballarat what it means to work and study in a coeducational, inclusive community where everyone is seen and treated in the image of their God. This opportunity gives us the responsibility to live in respectful relationships—celebrating our differences and embracing the chance to see many different perspectives. The world is calling on us, as people of justice, solidarity, and respect. We look to one another to show how we can live fairly and justly and how to be people of Christ. Our community needs a renewed sense of justice and a deeper understanding of respectful and unconditional positive regard. We must remember that Ballarat has a long history of social justice and a commitment to fighting for the marginalised—let us not forget the Eureka Rebellion of 1854, which occurred over 170 years ago.

Eureka was the moment when a democratic movement seized control of the political agenda by asserting its rights—a time when the people demanded equal and fair treatment and the right to participate in the democratic process. The key values underpinning Australia’s democracy stem from shared values and beliefs, such as freedom, equality, fairness, and justice in the Australian system of government—values that ensure everyone has the opportunity to have a ‘fair go’. Human rights are consistent with these values: respect, inclusion, civility, responsibility, and compassion.

As I reflect on the 2024 academic year, I am proud of our staff’s determination and tenacity to create a learning community that takes calculated risks, stretches our thinking, and continues to establish a culture that is forward-thinking and outward-looking. In 2025, the College will launch the St Brendan’s Learning Community, where students in Year 8 will participate in a term of alternate learning experiences that nurture the gifts of the individual and guide our students into new understandings. The 60-minute period will support our learners in deepening their knowledge and exploring more challenging concepts.

As Catholic educators, we work in partnership with our families, exploring new and refined processes to get the best from our young people and one another. I am so grateful for the many curricular and co-curricular activities that build self-esteem and confidence. The co-curricular life of our College enhances the experiences and connections within our community, and I am thankful for the work of the many teachers who tirelessly give up time away from their families to build our community. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of our College production teams, BAS sport, the camps for Years 7, 8, 9, and 11, the retreats and reflection days for Years 7 through 12, the music ensembles, the many clubs, debating and public speaking, and social justice teams. This list is not exhaustive but highlights our College’s commitment to the development of the whole person.

I would like to thank the many community members, our School Advisory Council, the Sisters of Mercy, the priests of Ballarat, and the families who place their trust in our school community. It would be remiss not to acknowledge the relentless support of our College Leadership Team and the many school leaders who work to ensure Damascus is our best, each and every day. I pray that we continue to work together in a spirit of hope, joy, and love.





B2B Team arriving at Damascus College campus

B2B - AN EPIC JOURNEY

SUSTAINABLE RACING TEAM

Damascus College recently celebrated a remarkable achievement as the Sustainable Racing Team (SRT) completed their ambitious B2B journey, a 1,085 km adventure from Broken Hill to Ballarat. This extraordinary expedition not only highlighted the team's commitment to sustainable transportation but also served as a powerful tribute to cancer research. With students from various year levels coming together, the journey was a testament to innovation, teamwork, and the spirit of making a positive impact. As the team navigated diverse terrains and engaged with local communities, they raised awareness for a noble cause, honouring the memory of a past student while inspiring future generations. Join us as we delve into the inspiring story of the SRT's B2B journey, a true celebration of resilience, learning, and social justice.

SRT is a group focused on innovation, sustainability, and making a positive impact. This team, composed of students from various year levels, shares a passion for sustainable transportation and social justice. The B2B journey was designed to raise awareness for cancer research while promoting sustainable transportation. The event took place from 6 May to 10 May 2024, offering students a chance to engage in hands-on learning and develop essential life skills. The

journey also honoured a past student, Connor Prunty, with funds raised going to the Fiona Elsey Cancer Research Institute in his memory.

The SRT is part of the co-curricular activities offered at Damascus College. Students volunteered to join the group, which primarily met on Tuesdays and Wednesdays after school, with additional working sessions on Saturdays when preparing for an event. This structure allowed students to collaborate and prepare effectively for their projects, such as the B2B journey.

The idea for the B2B journey arose due to the lack of Human Powered Races in Victoria, especially after the COVID pandemic. The SRT program, eager for new challenges, envisioned the journey from Broken Hill to Ballarat as a five-day road trip filled with adventure and purpose. The team began with a bus trip to Broken Hill, where their solar-assisted road-legal aerodynamic trike awaited.

The journey tested the students' endurance and teamwork. They took on roles such as promotions, catering, riding, pit crew, navigation,



Matt, Lucas and Campbell on the journey

solar management, and communications. Each role was crucial to the journey's success, and the student's demonstrated resilience and problem-solving skills.

Year 10 student Isabella Fensling (Issy), a rider and B2B catering assistant, said, "I like that SRT is a hands-on learning experience and incorporates and welcomes students from all year levels, which helps to build strong friendships. SRT promotes students to be problem solvers and assists in developing independent living skills for the future. The program helps students gain skills in working cohesively in a fast-paced team environment. SRT allows me and the other students the opportunities to grow and try things that may be out of our comfort zone. One of my highlights is working with carbon fibre and fibreglass when manufacturing parts of the trikes."

Year 9 student Oscar Howlett, who was involved in communications and was a rider, shared, "a huge part of the B2B Journey was the fact that it was live-streamed. I played a huge part in this and in just a few days had developed and grown skills. By being live-streamed, the ride was accessible to all of the Damascus College community, and being able to chat with the viewers, do live on-air interviews 'Chats with Oscar' was a highlight."

2024 College Captain Lucas Wells, who was the Crew Chief on the B2B Journey, added, "I volunteered to come on B2B as I saw it as not only a great journey but a way of giving back to the broader community by fundraising for the Fiona Elsey Cancer Research Centre, and gaining awareness for what we do as a program."

The team navigated diverse terrains, facing challenges and celebrating successes. The journey was about teamwork and raising funds for cancer research, making a meaningful impact on the community. The journey included stops at various locations, where the team engaged with local communities and shared their message of sustainability and social justice. These interactions provided valuable learning experiences for the students, who developed skills in communication and collaboration. The journey also included various STEM elements, enriching the students' learning experiences.

In Mildura, the team was welcomed with a fundraising BBQ, where they not only raised additional funds but acted as ambassadors for sustainability. The journey continued through Sea Lake and Horsham, with the team overcoming minor setbacks and enjoying sights like the Silo Art Trail.

Under the inspiring leadership of SRT Coordinator Alan Strange, the team navigated challenges with resilience and celebrated numerous victories along the way. As they arrived back at Damascus, the team was greeted by a sea of people made up of students and staff and a wave of pride swept over everyone as Issy was celebrated as the final rider. The presence of the Buninyong-Mount Helen Fire Brigade truck, bearing the name of Connor Prunty, served as a poignant reminder of the journey's profound purpose and the enduring impact of their mission.



B2B Team at Silo in Rosebery

To mark the significance of the journey, a special celebration of the B2B journey was held on 13 August at the Damascus College Events Centre. This event recognised the students, staff, volunteers, and sponsors who contributed to the journey's success. A key moment was the presentation of a cheque exceeding \$10,000, raised for the Fiona Elsey Cancer Research Institute.

The B2B journey was a significant achievement showcasing the SRT Teams' dedication to sustainability and social justice. It not only raised funds for a worthy cause but also provided students with an opportunity to develop essential life skills and forge lasting friendships. It was an amazing experience for all involved, filled with great times, lasting memories, and strengthened friendships. The B2B journey serves as a reminder of the power of collective action and the importance of environmental stewardship, inspiring future generations to make a positive impact.



B2B Team in Broken Hill

The B2B Team

First Name	Last Name	Yr	B2B Role
Harry	Elliot	8	Pit Crew & Catering Assistant
Sebastian	Erwin	10	Rider
Isabella	Fensling	10	Rider & Catering Assistant
Alex	Fitzpatrick	8	Pit Crew
Rowan	Goon	9	Rider and Navigation
Matt	Hanrahan	12	Driver and Pit Crew
Oscar	Howlett	9	Communications & Rider
Ryder	Macklin	8	Pit Crew
Jameson	Reus	8	Pit Crew
Lachlan	Reus	10	Rider & Navigation Assistant
Ted	Sculley	11	Rider
Ronan	Sugars	10	Rider & Video Assistant
Lucas	Wells	12	Crew Chief
Campbell	White	12	Energy Manager
Alan	Strange		SRT Coordinator
Paul	Blanchfield		Staff
Karen	Pengelly		Volunteer
Paul	Fitzpatrick		Volunteer



Rider change on the journey



B2B Team



KARON DONNELLON RSM

DAMASCUS SISTER OF MERCY

In November 2023, St Martin's in the Pines alumni Sister Karon Donnellon RSM, Class of 1974 was elected the Institute Leader of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea. Karon recently took a moment to reflect on how the Mercy charism inspired her and that she is impressed by the way Mercy is being lived today by Damascus College students and alumni.

Sr Karon shares that while Catherine McAuley would no doubt have been very pleased with the many achievements of Damascus College's current students and alumni, she could not have begun to imagine that she would be a source of inspiration for generations of people in Ballarat in 2024.

"If someone had told Catherine then that she would inspire generation after generation at Damascus College over the other side of the world 200 years later, she would have been shocked beyond belief!" said Sister Karon Donnellon, Institute Leader of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Yet most of us are unaware of the legacy we are building in our own lives and the large impact that we may be having."

Karon went on to add, "While the acts of Mercy being undertaken by students and alumni of Damascus today may be different from those of Catherine and the early sisters, the underlying inspiration is the same."

"Mercy has always been spread by one good deed at a time, causing a ripple effect. Catherine did not set out to start a revolution; instead, she sought to bring about change through building relationships, which is why her legacy has lived on."

The theme of relationships, not revolution, is one which Sister Karon strongly believes is as much an antidote for a troubled world in 2024 as it was when Catherine opened the House of Mercy in Dublin in 1827. Nine months into her role as Institute Leader, she continues to reflect on the question, What does the world still need from the Mercies?

Karon believes that one answer to this question is that, "One answer to this question, is that we need to live our lives as people of Mercy

in such a way that we positively influence the people around us so that they then influence the people around them and so on."

"We need people who are Living Mercy, which I am pleased is the College theme chosen by Damascus for 2024, by espousing the Mercy values which have been a focus for the students this year – respect, courage, compassion, hospitality, justice, and service.

"As a Sister of Mercy, I am in a privileged position that I get to hear about the inspiring ways many current Damascus College students and alumni are living Mercy."

"They are building on the legacy of the founders of the Sisters of Mercy and Christian Brothers and the sisters and brothers who came after them."

Karon traces the start of her own contribution to this legacy to her final two years at school, as a boarder at St Martin's in the Pines in the early 1970s and the pioneering education she received.

"The sisters created the school with an innovative curriculum and developed a culture based on self-responsibility. The school enabled young women to flourish both academically and socially, and they treated us like adults. We called teachers by their first names, there were no bells, and we were responsible for making sure we got to class on time" said Sister Karon.

"In addition to the traditional science and arts subjects, we were introduced to Environmental Science and Modern Thought and Culture.

"This was during an era when career options for women were limited, yet the sisters developed for us a broad curriculum that opened up a wide range of potential career paths."

When asked how she became a Sister of Mercy,

"I realised I was seeking something else, and I wasn't sure what that was. Whenever I gathered with my girlfriends, they talked about career options and marriage. While both are important, I always felt that I wanted to pursue a different path, and in time I realised that path was as a Sister of Mercy" Karon replied.



Karon in uniform at St Martin's in the Pines

Sister Karon said she had stayed in touch with a couple of sisters from school, and when she was growing up, some of the local sisters from Charlton were regular visitors to her family's farm in Jeffcott.

"I was always struck by their selflessness and the way in which they were so practical in putting others first."

"I tried to avoid it, yet eventually, I came to a point in my life where I just thought I have to know whether this life is for me, and so I entered the convent, and some 43 years later, I am still here!"



Karon in the Mercy Chapel at Damascus College

Sister Karon joined the Ballarat East Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy in 1981 and was finally professed in 1989. In the early 80s, she taught at Sacred Heart and St Martin's in the Pines, where she was also a boarding house mistress. In the years that have followed, she has spent time as a juvenile justice chaplain, diocesan youth director, mission director, facilitator, and adult educator. Last year, Karon was elected as Institute Leader, a role that has seen her temporarily relocate from Ballarat to Sydney. She joins fellow Sacred Heart College and St Martins in the Pines alumni, Sister Elizabeth Moloney, on the leadership team.

When asked if she is daunted to be called to leadership at a time when religious life is undergoing such rapid change, Karon returns to the sentiments expressed at the start of this interview by saying that while the model of religious life that existed when she entered is changing, she is confident the charisma of Catherine McAuley will vibrantly live on in the women and men who graduate from schools such as Damascus College.

"Damascus is flourishing because it recognises the foundations and values on which it has been built. It is doing this by not being stuck in the past, but by preparing the leaders of tomorrow to walk their own path to make a positive difference in the world one step at a time and to live out Catherine McAuley's simple yet powerful instruction, 'to be good today - but better tomorrow'."

Karon Donellan, Class of 1974

With thanks to the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea for their assistance with this article.



Damascus College Principal Steven Mifsud and Karon

STAYING CONNECTED

UPDATE YOUR DETAILS

Damascus College invites all alumni, including past students and staff from our foundation schools—Sacred Heart College, St Paul’s Technical College, St Martin’s in the Pines and Damascus College—to update their contact details and stay connected with the College. Together, we celebrate our history and recognise the important role these foundation schools have played in shaping our community.

Damascus aims to create lasting connections between the College and its alumni. The College is committed to engaging alumni through various activities that foster connections and interest. There are plenty of opportunities for alumni to reconnect with each other and the College, whether through reunions, special events, or alumni Facebook groups.

By updating your details, you can stay involved with the College and fellow alumni. Join us for reunions and special events, connect through Alumni Facebook Groups, become a guest speaker, and keep up with our publications. You can also participate in the Alumni Art and Technology Prize and nominate a fellow past student as part of the Shining Light Award for Inspiring Alumni.

Your involvement helps keep our community vibrant and ensures the legacy of Damascus College and its foundation schools continue. We encourage you to update your contact information to stay connected with us.

We look forward to sharing more moments and memories with you as part of the Damascus College community.

Stay connected by updating your details online at www.damascus.vic.edu.au/community/alumni/stay-connected

Facebook is another great way to stay informed about upcoming Reunions & Events. Alumni can join our group on Facebook - Damascus College Ballarat Alumni: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/306094479488554>

Scan here to update your details:



50 Year Celebrations in 2017



Class of 1989 Reunion in 2019



140 Year Gala Event in 2022



WELCOMING A NEW LEADER

BRETT HOLLOWAY

As the new Leader of Finance and Operations at Damascus College, I am thrilled to share my journey with you. My name is Brett Holloway, and I hold a life-long belief in the power of Catholic education. Being a product of this enriching system myself, I first encountered the Mercy tradition and values that have shaped my life.

My educational journey began at St Alipius Kindergarten, followed by St Alipius Parish Primary School, and then St Patrick's College. I furthered my studies at the University of Ballarat, where I completed a Bachelor of Business, majoring in Accounting and Information Systems. This journey has come full circle with our four children attending the same institutions, from St Alipius Kindergarten and Parish Primary School to Loreto College, St Patrick's College, and Damascus College, and even extending to the Australian Catholic University. Over 13 continuous years of primary schooling, my family and I embraced every opportunity to be involved, from serving on the Damascus Board/School Advisory Council to participating in School Fairs and more.

This involvement has deepened my connection with my Parish, St Alipius Ballarat East, where I received all my sacraments. In 2008, I proudly formed the Parish Finance Committee, where I continue to serve. My participation in various stewardship renewal programs has been fulfilling, and you can often find me welcoming parishioners, reading, serving as a Minister of the Eucharist, or assisting with collections.

My transition to Damascus College began in 2018 as a member of the Catholic Vision & Values Subcommittee, eventually chairing the School Community Subcommittee. With a structural change, I joined the Future & Stewardship Subcommittee, where I now serve from a leadership perspective. Concurrently, I was invited to join the College Board, contributing to Strategic Planning and the Future Governance Working Party, which led to a governance change and the move to DOBCEL. Now in 2024, as part of the School Advisory Council, I have transitioned from a community member to a leadership representative.

Professionally, my journey started in an Accounting firm, where I completed my postgraduate studies and qualified as a Chartered Accountant. I then moved to a legal firm as an Accountant and Practice Manager, before returning to a large Accounting and Taxation firm as a trusted adviser to many individuals and businesses across diverse industries.

Celebrated for my 25-year milestone award as a Chartered Accountant, I was honoured to advance to Fellowship last year, a recognition based on community involvement and mentoring emerging Chartered Accountants.

Outside of work, I am a passionate and caring community member with varied interests. My involvement in the Scouting movement, from Cubs to Scouts to Venturers, earned me the distinction of a Queen's Scout (now King's Scout), and I have given back many years as a leader. I also have a long-standing passion for Vintage and Classic cars, actively participating in the administration of the historic vehicle movement.

Locally, I have held numerous positions with the Vintage & Classic Car Club Ballarat, where I currently serve as Vice President and a member of the building subcommittee. At the state level, I have held an executive position as Treasurer for the past 24 years and have been a Delegate to the National body.

In my role at Damascus College, I am part of the leadership team overseeing Finance, Property, ICT, and Administration. The College is at an exciting phase with the construction of a new multi-level senior learning centre, set to open next year, along with a covered outdoor learning area, as part of our ongoing masterplan.

Damascus College has always been a welcoming community, and I am eager to bring my skills and experience to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our young people. Being so deeply involved with Catholic education and now working in this space fills me with a sense of grounding and excitement for the future. I look forward to contributing to the vibrant community at Damascus College and supporting the growth and development of our students.

Car picture courtesy of Ryan & Anthony Holloway





SHAPING A CAREER INTO A LIFESTYLE

ALUMNI STORY

For some, a job is a source of income, while for others, a career is a part of who we are, it shapes our daily lives, aligns with goals and values and drives individuals to achieve both personal and professional goals, and for Sean Toohey, the career that drives his motivation and purpose, is real estate.

Sean Toohey (Class of 2004) has worked in the real estate industry for fifteen years and is now a Director of McGrath Real Estate in Ballarat, where he alongside two other business partners have been successfully operating for six years. Sean's career in Real Estate however, started soon after he departed the grounds of Damascus College as a graduate.

Like many students Sean wasn't sure what his pathway was going to look like after graduating, he knew that he enjoyed the company of people, building rapport and had a friendly personality, so he played to his strengths and took to the streets of Ballarat with a resume in hand and approached local real estate businesses. With his eagerness to learn and already demonstrating a drive to work, Sean was soon offered employment and commenced his career at Wes Davison Real Estate.

After completing his first few years of employment at Wes Davison, Sean then had a break from the real estate industry and explored other employment and career opportunities – something that now upon reflection, Sean is grateful for, as he gained many skills, traits and takeaways during this time that he incorporates into his career now.

The move first being, an enrolment into a Business Marketing Degree at the University of Ballarat, completing a year and a half of the degree, and having learnt business marketing skills that he now applies to sale listings and business strategy, Sean decided that he enjoyed being out in the workforce and that the study environment of university was not the right fit for him, to which he then moved on a job in Civil Construction.

Sean worked for the civil construction company that his father worked at in Melbourne for a few years and while there worked on various roadwork projects throughout the city. Growing up in a hardworking family, Sean credits his time in the industry and the influence of his family as the foundation of his strong work ethic today.



Sean and his wife Jacqui, with their four children

However, Sean felt a pull back to real estate, returning to a field he truly enjoyed and the career and lifestyle it offered. He was drawn to the appeal of building relationships with clients, witnessing the tangible results of his efforts, and the flexibility of hours that were more family friendly, as he and his wife were starting a family.

Sean met his wife Jacqui while at Damacus College, they have been married for ten years and have four beautiful children. Shaping a career that prioritised a work-life balance and integrated into his family lifestyle was important to Sean, and real estate allows the flexibility to schedule appointments and tasks around his family, freeing valuable time to be a devoted father and husband.

Fifteen years on in the industry, Sean is a full-time sales agent and director, and alongside his business partners, they manage two McGrath Real Estate offices in Ballarat and Ballan, comprising of 27 staff and a portfolio of 650 rental properties in addition to sale listings.

At McGrath, Sean is dedicated to fostering a holistic work environment that empowers the next generation of agents to thrive in their careers. By supporting them with the skills and resources

they need to succeed. While the industry can be demanding, often requiring a six-day workweek, Sean and the team emphasise flexibility and cultivate a workplace culture where employees look forward to coming in, and with the opportunity to achieve rewarding results in their career, while maintaining a healthy-work life balance that encourages everyone to excel.

During his own time in real estate, Sean has found it rewarding to see results from the work and effort that is put in. Having now worked in the industry for some time, he takes pride in seeing both the short- and long-term results from creating positive relationships with clients. Whether its securing repeat business, receiving positive word of mouth, or facilitating intergenerational sales, Sean has crafted his career that feels more like a lifestyle, one that allows him to cherish time with family whilst also remaining motivated in his field and creating a positive work environment for his employees.

Sean Toohey, Class of 2004



FR BARRY THOMAS RYAN

08.09.1938 - 22.06.2024

Students and teachers of Damascus College and many former students who attended Sacred Heart College or St Paul's Technical College need no introduction to Fr Barry Ryan. From 1966 until 2024, he was a significant presence in the lives of many families connected with the College and in the lives of countless teachers whom he mentored at Australian Catholic University and/or in his role as Director of Religious Education. As we mourn his recent death, we acknowledge that his influence lives on in the Damascus community. His engagement with staff and students alike was a source of great joy for Barry.

Barry was born in Warrnambool and grew up with his three sisters on a farm at Hopkins Point, between the Hopkins River and the Southern Ocean. Life on the farm and his early education at the Lake Gilliar Primary School imprinted in Barry a love of the natural world that was to inform his life, his preaching and his teaching until the day he died.

His fidelity to environmental as well as social justice was legendary. Barry's first appointment after ordination was to the Ballarat East parish. He preached about the felling of trees in the Amazon and its consequences, the degradation of the soil and the polluting of skies and of seas long before the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer.

He began his priestly ministry in this parish, home to Damascus College and its earlier incarnations, and concluded his priestly ministry as visiting priest in this same parish.

Barry was a lifelong learner. From the very outset, he attended to his own ongoing education, working full-time in the parish while enrolling in an Arts degree at Melbourne University, where he completed studies in psychology, philosophy, comparative religions and biblical studies. Barry's talent as a faith educator was affirmed by his appointment in 1971 as the Diocesan Director of Religious Education.

The Religious Education Centre grew into an institution to be reckoned with, addressing the needs of teachers in the schools and faith educators in the parishes. He undertook further studies in religious education and applied psychology at Fordham University in New York in the early seventies and in theology at the Melbourne College of Divinity in the eighties. Barry simply never stopped learning.

In order to finance his accommodation in New York, Barry taught religious education classes at St Helena's High School in the Bronx, where he was assigned a group of students for whom learning was anything but a high priority. Barry brought to his work with these students the famous Tavistock approaches to learning that were part of his studies and that continued to inform his engagement over the years with adult groups, university students, communication groups, parish groups and various support groups.

After a very short time, Barry had those tough young adults eating out of his hand and actually learning as no one had ever thought possible. The film "Spare Parts", featuring street kids who were the bane of every teacher's career, yet loved into life and even national acclaim by one teacher who believed in them, evokes the experience of Barry with those kids in the Bronx.

For Barry, the first rule was to listen, while the second was to listen again and the third was to keep on listening. He believed strongly that being heard provides healing for the inevitable hurts that one encounters in life and prevents those hurt from metamorphosing into destructive states of being. Barry Ryan listened and brought healing to innumerable lives.

We give thanks for the life of Fr Barry Ryan, faithful priest, devoted family member, faith-filled proclaimer of the gospel, mentor, counsellor, storyteller, consciousness-raiser, and above all a treasured and faithful friend who showed us what it means to be human.

Article prepared by Veronica Lawson RSM



Fr Barry as a child



Fr Barry with siblings





SRC students with the message stick

A TRIBUTE TO CULTURAL HARMONY IN THE DIOCESE OF BALLARAT

CELEBRATING 150 YEARS

This year, the Diocese of Ballarat marks a significant milestone: its 150th anniversary. To commemorate this important occasion and honour the rich cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Diocese is undertaking a meaningful and symbolic gesture by having four Message Sticks embark on a journey across each Catholic school within the Diocese. The Message Sticks, a unique and powerful symbol in Indigenous Australian culture, will travel to schools across the Diocese's four education zones and carry the message to "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Romans 12:12). These sticks will not only signify the journey of the Diocese but also embody the ongoing commitment to acknowledging and valuing the traditions and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within the region.

The Message Sticks were crafted by Trevor Clark and Vicki Clark OAM, a DOBCEL Board Director and founder of The Aboriginal Catholic Ministry of Victoria (ACMV). They were blessed by Fr

Marcello Colasante and presented to representatives of the four diocesan education zones during the Catholic Education Week Mass held in Ballarat in May.

The Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited, our governing body DOBCEL, shared with us the details of the story and symbols shown on the Message Stick: From the Murray to the Sea, the Creator Spirit spoke to the Ancestors thousands of years before Abraham and Moses. The Creator Spirit touched the sacredness of country and all that had been created, gifting the ancestors with the law to care for country, the waterways, the animals, and to co-exist with all that had been created. The symbols on the Message Stick include the journey track representing the thousands of students and school staff, and the many great gifts shared along the journey. The Southern Cross guides you as you travel in the four directions, while the four U designs represent the leaders in the regions gathering to share stories, ideas, and support each other. Finally, the two circles represent the river and the ocean waters.

At the heart of this initiative is a central “Mother Stick,” which will remain at the Catholic Education Ballarat (CEB) Office. This Mother Stick serves as the spiritual and symbolic anchor of the project, linking the four travelling Message Sticks and representing the unity and continuity of the Diocese’s mission. The Mother Stick’s presence at the CEB Office underscores the Diocese’s dedication to maintaining a deep and respectful connection with Indigenous cultures as it progresses into its next 150 years.

In July, Damascus College had the privilege of receiving one of the Message Sticks from St James Parish School, with a liturgy in the Damascus College chapel that underscored our commitment to cultural respect and educational engagement.

The Message Sticks were then on display in the St Martin’s Resource Centre for a week, during which time they prompted discussions designed to deepen our understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. As the week ended, we prepared for the next step in their journey by passing them on to Emmaus Catholic Primary School. This transition was not just a handover but a continuation of their larger journey, reminding all that from the Murray to the Sea, we are a hope-filled Catholic community of communities.

By intertwining the diocesan anniversary with this gesture of cultural respect, the Diocese of Ballarat demonstrates a commitment to reconciliation and the ongoing relationship-building necessary for true understanding and respect. The Message Sticks stand as a testament to the power of symbolic acts in fostering genuine connections and honouring the heritage of all communities. The journey of the Message Sticks is a powerful reminder of the Diocese’s dedication to reconciliation, respect, and the vibrant tapestry of cultures that enrich its educational mission.



Passing on the message stick to Emmaus, Primary School



GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDFRIENDS DAY

DAMASCUS EVENT

On Wednesday, 14 August, Damascus College was delighted to host our inaugural Grandparents and Grandfriends Day for our Year 7 students and their families.

The celebration was held in recognition of World Day for Grandparents, providing a special opportunity for grandparents and grandfriends to experience the daily life of their students at the College. It also allowed students to express their appreciation and gratitude to the important "grand" figures in their lives.

On the day, the Year 7 students proudly welcomed their guests to the campus, eager and ready to spend a special morning together.

The celebration began with a liturgy in which students took part in readings, and as the liturgy was coming to a close, students stood beside their grandparent or grandfriend placing a hand on their shoulder as a gesture of love and respect.

Following the liturgy, was a Year 7 student's heartfelt acknowledgement and tribute to grandparents, reflecting on the joy, significance, and legacy that our "grand" figures imprint on our lives. The tribute highlighted the many reasons grandparents are cherished, from special moments shared and the stories they tell, to their role as personal cheer leaders, the knowledge and skills they impart and, most importantly, their unconditional love and warm hugs.

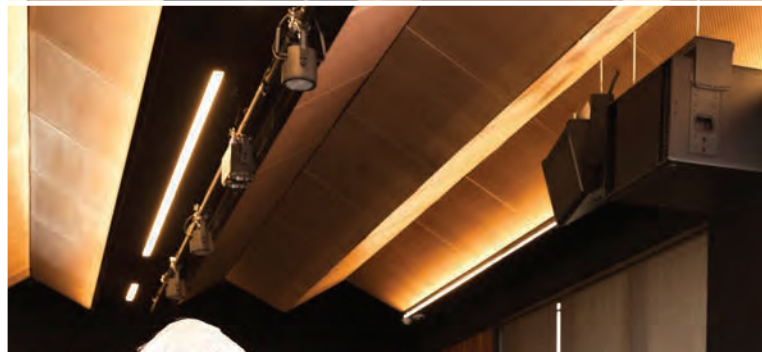
A range of student speakers then shared their experiences and opportunities they have had so far, giving grandparents an insight into what the students have been up to at Damascus College over the last two terms.

Two Year 12 student representative council students also prepared and presented a speech to the audience, giving a glimpse into what some of the different opportunities that will be available to the year 7 students as they progress throughout their high school years.

A school tour was then held, led by student tour leaders, who proudly guided the guests around the campus. The Year 7 student accompanied the tour with their grandparents, highlighting the important areas of the college that held significance to them.

The morning celebration wrapped up at the Damascus Events Centre with morning tea, allowing Year 7 students and their guests to enjoy some quality time together over a cuppa and some delicious food. It was heart warming to see the students making their guests a cup of tea, embodying the Mercy value of hospitality.

It was a wonderful morning celebrating our grandparents and grandfriends, filled with joy, connection, and cherished memories.





Mollie and family

MY SACRED HEART COLLEGE MEMORIES

ALUMNI STORY

As I look back on my time at Sacred Heart College in the early 1980's, I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the experiences that shaped my life and the wonderful people I met along the way. My years at this school not only laid the groundwork for my future but also instilled in me values that I carry with me to this day.

As a Day Scholar, I commuted to school each day, while the boarders lived at St Martin's in the Pines. Although no students were boarding at our Victoria Street campus, I often found myself curious about their experiences. In later years, I learned from those boarders about their lives, and I was fascinated by their stories. To a teenager who had never really been anywhere, the idea of living somewhere that wasn't home seemed exotic and thrilling.

Sacred Heart College was a lively place, run by the remarkable Sr Therese Power, a striking figure who embodied strength and compassion. Athletic and dynamic, she was a strong woman who inspired both students and staff alike. Her kindness and understanding created an environment where we felt supported and encouraged to reach our full potential. Sr Therese's leadership was

instrumental in shaping the culture of the school, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

It was at Sacred Heart that I learned the power of giving. Through various community service initiatives and charitable events organized by the school, I discovered how impactful even small acts of kindness can be.

Whether it was collecting donations for those in need or volunteering our time to help others, these experiences taught me that giving is not just about material contributions; it's about sharing our time, talents, and compassion with those around us. This lesson has remained with me throughout my life, reminding me that we all have the ability to make a difference, no matter how small.

The importance of giving extends beyond the immediate benefits to those we help; it fosters a sense of connection and empathy within our communities. By engaging in acts of kindness, we not only uplift others but also enrich our own lives. The relationships we build through giving create a ripple effect, inspiring others to do the same and cultivating a culture of generosity and support.

However, I was a shy student who often hesitated to put my hand up or take on leadership roles. I regret not stepping out of my comfort zone more often, as I missed opportunities to grow and connect with my peers in ways that could have enriched my experience.

One of my greatest joys during my time at Sacred Heart was my love for reading. I often found myself sitting on the stairs, waiting for the library to open, as it was my safe place. The library was a sanctuary where I could escape into different worlds and immerse myself in stories. It provided me with comfort and solace, especially during times when I felt overwhelmed.

While I may not have been the most outgoing student, I cherished the friendships I formed. My classmates and I supported each other through both the ups and downs of school life, and those bonds have lasted well beyond our school years.

Looking back, I am thankful for the influence of my teachers and mentors, especially Sr Therese Power. Their dedication made a lasting impact on me. They created a warm and supportive environment that allowed us to grow, and I feel lucky to have been part of that community.

Now, in my retirement in sunny Queensland, I enjoy a new chapter filled with family, relaxation, and the occasional adventure. My journey from the halls of Sacred Heart College to where I am today has been quite the ride. I often share stories of my time at Sacred Heart with my family and friends, hoping to inspire them with the values I hold dear.

As I reflect on my journey, I realise that my time at Sacred Heart College was more than just an education; it was a formative experience that shaped who I am. I hope that the spirit of students like me continues to thrive, encouraging future generations to embrace change and strive for their best in all they do.

Mollie Sheppard nee Dill, Class of 1981



Mollie in Sacred Heart uniform



Mollie and husband, Ted



Resource Centre Leader, Sharon Hayes and students

A PLACE FOR ALL

THE ST MARTINS RESOURCE CENTRE

The St Martins Resource Centre (SMRC) is a vibrant hub of activity, bustling with students and staff every day. With its central location and inviting atmosphere, the SMRC functions as both a recreational and educational space within the College.

It provides a versatile environment where students can attend class, access services, study, borrow resources, find a quiet spot for reading or connect with peers, this welcoming space caters to the diverse needs of all students.

A key focus of the SMRC is to support students' learning and teaching. It is staffed full-time with educational support personnel and teacher librarians who assist students in accessing relevant resources needed for their studies. It provides a welcoming environment embraced by both classes and individual learners.

Year 7 to 9 English classes meet every two weeks to read together or engage in literacy-focused activities, while senior students utilize the space for dedicated study.

The library collection features a wide range of curriculum-focused books alongside popular titles for recreational reading. Additionally, students can access an online platform called LibGuides, which provides subject-specific resources, e-books, and other valuable information related to their studies.

One of the key events on the SMRC calendar that captures its essence and generates excitement around reading, is Book Week. This year, Book Week began with a Harry Potter themed treasure hunt hosted by Read By Renee, where students explored a map and participated in engaging activities. Staff members also joined in on the fun by dressing up for the occasion. Additional activities for the week included badge and bookmark making, a trivia quiz and various competitions.



Book Week activities

In addition to events like Book Week, the SMRC actively engages with various awareness days and other events happening within the College, through hosting competitions or putting up displays for example. This commitment helps foster a sense of community and keeps students informed and involved in important issues and celebrations throughout the academic year.

During recess and lunch, you will see the SMRC a buzz with students who use the space in a range of different ways, some to have quiet time to read a book, while others meet to engage with peers over games or to attend one of the student driven clubs, the clubs that currently meet in the area are Chess, Book and Writing clubs.

This semester during lunch and recess, the SMRC team started a new initiative of 'Tech Free Tuesdays', encouraging students to disconnect from their electronic devices and engage in offline activities. This initiative has seen students play the different board games available and even bringing in the favourites from home to share with friends, Tech free Tuesdays has provided some much-needed time away from screens

Along with the literacy-based learning and access to resources, the SMRC serves as a hub for a range of student services, including counselling, IT support, and the Careers Department.

In essence, the SMRC plays an integral role in supporting students throughout their educational journey, catering to their needs for learning, well-being, and leisure. It truly is a welcoming space for all, that fosters a sense of community and provides the resources necessary for personal and academic growth.



Year 7 Art display



Tech free Tuesdays



Cast and Crew of The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT TIME

DAMASCUS PRODUCTION

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, as a title is quite a mouthful but the storyline, characters, and play proved quite the contrast to the eccentric and spooky The Addams Family Musical from last year. The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is a mystery novel written by Mark Haddon and was developed into an award-winning play (despite the author thinking that it was unstageable) by Simon Stephens.

The rehearsal process for 'The Curious incident of the Dog in the Night-time' was always quite challenging as we sought to create in each scene the appropriate level of reality versus the theatricality. The play provided a great opportunity for student actors to explore a range of issues that were presented within this dramatic yet heart-warming piece of theatre.

The play followed the seemingly ordinary life of 15-year-old Christopher Boone who has an exceptional brain but is at odds with everyday life which often overwhelms him. Christopher however struggles when interacting with those around him, adding an

interesting twist to the plot as he must interview people and conduct detective work to determine who killed Wellington, a neighbour's dog.

At the heart of our experience of this work was the realisation that the lead character of 'Christopher' has a presence in all our lives. He exists, in varying extents in our classrooms, community, families and sometimes diagnosed or not in ourselves.

I've always felt that the tradition of having a straight play as an alternate to the school musical offers students a unique point of difference and opportunity to explore the actor's craft. In a dramatic play there are no distractions in the form of songs or dance breaks. All you have are characters and the actor's raw ability to drive a plot. The play comprised of a small ensemble cast of students from years 10 through to 12 and employed a dynamic use of soundtrack, sound effects, projection and lighting to enhance Christopher's world.

The eagerness, the energy and enthusiasm of the performers and what they brought to rehearsals and the final performances was nothing short of inspiring. With two productions on the go this year and both being rehearsed simultaneously the Performing Arts department is forever grateful for the fantastic creative team at Damascus that supported us. These individuals made up of staff, current students, alumni and family members all gave so selflessly to make this production the best it could be.

Part of the shows appeal was a number of physical sequences that endeavour to give substance to the way Christopher sees his day to day experiences. These moments of choreography and conceptual movement were skilfully devised and workshopped by Year 12 cast members Zoe Newman and Taya Thiele.

This realistic play tackled many aspects of life that aren't usually seen or depicted in a school production and to do so the young cast had to display a maturity beyond their years. One of the comments many of the team received was that they forgot they were watching a secondary show. This is the highest of compliments as the ability to suspend disbelief which enables the audience to enter into the characters world is at the very heart of a great theatre.

We hoped that by highlighting the life of a single person and their unique challenges, that we did justice to those whose stories are not always heard.

Andrew Seeary, Performing Arts Coordinator, Drama Production Director





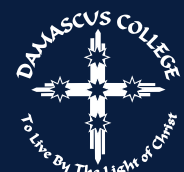
ST PAULS REUNION

Saturday 22 February
2pm - 4pm
Damascus Events Centre

Past students and staff of St Paul's Technical College are warmly invited to a reunion celebrating your significance as a foundation school.

Join us to reminisce, reconnect, and enjoy light refreshments!

Scan below to register:



#TogetherWeAreDamascus



St Paul's Bottle Drive in 1981

ST PAUL'S BOTTLE DRIVE

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Our 'Blast from the Past' series presents a snapshot of the history of Damascus College and its foundation colleges, Sacred Heart College, St Paul's Technical College, and St Martin's in the Pines, reminding us of the small moments in our past that may be special to some, long forgotten by others, but safely stored away in our Archives.

Above is a photo from 1981 that was published in the St Paul's Technical School "End of an Era" (1948-1987) publication, highlighting the Bottle Drive held during the 1970s and 1980s.

This annual fundraising event raised nearly \$30,000 over its 10+ years, a significant sum for St Paul's. Among those thanked in the accompanying article were Brian McMahon, Parents & Friends Association Treasurer from 1981 to 1985, and Harry Gibcus, a St Paul's student from 1957 to 1959 and teacher from 1976 to 1986.

The Damascus College Archives department would love to hear from you! If you have a special school memory you would like us to revisit in our 'Blast from the Past' series, let us know at archives@damascus.vic.edu.au



Smoking Ceremony

DAMASCUS DAY

DAMASCUS EVENT

On Wednesday 13 September, Damascus College came alive with the vibrant celebration of Damascus Day, a cherished event honouring the college's unique identity. Established in 1995 through the amalgamation of three foundational colleges—Sacred Heart, St Paul's, and St Martin's in the Pines, with roots dating back to 1881—Damascus College has a rich history that was proudly celebrated on this special day.

The festivities commenced with a whole school mass and assembly, presided over by Fr Marcello Colasante. The College theme, "To live by the light of Christ," was thoughtfully explored within the community. The college choir and the African drumming club enriched the mass with their musical talents, creating a harmonious atmosphere. A poignant moment unfolded as Year 12 students passed a candle to Year 7 students, symbolising the transfer of light and the continuation of living by the light of Christ.

During the assembly, the 2024 student leadership team was introduced to the College community. Fr Marcello blessed their leadership badges, which were then proudly adorned on their blazers, marking the beginning of their leadership journey. The Justice Action Group highlighted the social justice and fundraising initiatives undertaken throughout the year, emphasising the importance of aiding those less fortunate. Meanwhile, the Sustainability Group showcased a video to inspire students to champion environmental care at Damascus. The annual "passing of the colours" ceremony saw House Leaders pass coloured banners over students in the four houses of Xavier, Rice, St Martin, and McAuley, reinforcing house spirit and unity.



Damascus Day Mass

The celebration of Damascus College's Catholic identity was truly wonderful. The excitement continued as the SRC students organised an afternoon filled with engaging activities for everyone to enjoy. The campus buzzed with energy as this year's theme, "Icons," invited students and staff to dress as their favourite movie characters, sporting heroes, musical legends, or historical figures.

A free BBQ and food trucks catered to the crowd, while a variety of activities, including a dunk tank, celebrity head, basketball connect 4, longest kick, rowing competition, cupcake decorating, dance competitions, musical chairs, soccer shootout, and bubble soccer, kept everyone entertained.

The creativity and enthusiasm of those who dressed in theme were commendable, with fantastic costumes seen across the campus. It was heart-warming to witness the smiling faces of Damascus students as the college community came together to celebrate their shared identity.







Glassware that once belonged to Alice Fanning

DONATION TO THE ARCHIVES

ALICE FANNING

The Damascus College Archives recently had the pleasure of welcoming back alumni Cathy Wilson, née Walsh (Class of 1974), to our campus. Cathy generously donated a collection of family glassware that once belonged to Alice Fanning, a beloved figure in the history of Damascus College. Alice Fanning (1875-1960) was the proud owner of 21 hectares of beautiful bushland in Mount Clear. In the 1950s, she graciously opened this land to Sacred Heart College (SHC) students for science excursions.

Alice was looked after by the Sisters of Mercy, and upon her passing in 1960, Alice bequeathed her entire property to the Sisters of Mercy, with the wish that a school or hospital be established there. This dream was realised in 1968 when St Martin's in the Pines opened as a senior campus with boarding facilities, becoming part of Sacred Heart College. Today, this very land is home to Damascus College.

Cathy, the eldest of seven sisters who all attended Sacred Heart College and later St Martin's in the Pines, shared fond memories of her family's connection to Alice Fanning. Her parents, Brian and Margaret Walsh, built their home on Jones Avenue in 1957, becoming neighbours to Alice.

Cathy recalls her mother, Margaret, frequently visiting Alice and forming a close friendship. One of her earliest memories, at around four years old, is visiting Alice shortly before her passing, vividly remembering a group of nuns gathered in the room, reciting the rosary as Alice lay in bed. After Alice's death, Cathy's mother helped pack up her house and was gifted some of the cherished glassware.

Brian and Margaret Walsh were not only parents to daughters who attended Sacred Heart College and St Martin's in the Pines, but they also worked at St Martin's. Brian served as the campus caretaker from 1967 to around 1992, while Margaret worked as a cleaner in the Boarding House. Even after Cathy had left school, married, and had children, she would often assist her mother with cleaning jobs on campus.

The glassware donated by the Walsh family is more than just a collection of antique pieces; it is a tangible link to our past. These items will become a treasured part of Damascus College's historical collection, offering students, staff, and visitors a glimpse into our rich heritage.

Damascus College extends heartfelt gratitude to Cathy Wilson for her generous donation on behalf of her parents. Contributions like these are vital in supporting the Archives' mission to preserve our stories and celebrate our history. As Damascus College continues to grow and evolve, we remain committed to honouring the contributions of our alumni and supporters.

Cathy Wilson's donation of Alice Fanning's glassware enriches our collection and serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring bond between the college and its alumni. It is a beautiful gesture that underscores the importance of preserving history and celebrating the legacies of our foundation schools, which have shaped Damascus College into what it is today.

Over the years, the Damascus College Archives has been fortunate to receive many wonderful donations from our alumni. Often, the stories behind these items are as valuable to our history as the items themselves. The College Archivist encourages anyone holding cherished items from their school years to consider donating them to our Archives, where they will become a celebrated part of our heritage.

The Archive is the repository of our school's rich history, preserving the stories, accomplishments, and milestones that have shaped our college over the years. Our history is intertwined with that of our foundation colleges: Sacred Heart College, St Paul's Technical College, and St Martin's in the Pines. Without them, Damascus College would not exist. Rest assured, your donations will be treasured in our secure archives facility and will help future generations of Damascus College students learn from our shared heritage.

To discuss a potential donation, please contact the College Archivist at archives@damascus.vic.edu.au.



Alice Fanning



Cathy Wilson on campus donating glassware



Sara with Alysoun Smalley, Leader of Curriculum and Assessment and Damascus College Principal, Steven Mifsud



Sara with Victorian Premier, the Hon Jacinta Allan

FINDING MY POTENTIAL

ALUMNI STORY

Hi, I'm Sara Abu Asbeh, and I recently completed Year 12. What a whirlwind it was! Balancing academic pressure, newfound freedoms, celebrations, and the responsibilities of growing up, all while making crucial decisions about the future, was no small feat. It felt like it would never end, but trust me, it does, and you will graduate.

One of the most helpful things I did during this time was writing. Putting pen to paper forced me to problem-solve and apply what I was learning. This constant application helped me develop a voice in my work, going beyond the standard structure. The constructive feedback from my teachers was invaluable, and it helped me improve my quick-thinking skills. This practice played a significant role in me receiving the Premier's VCE English award.

The award recognises those who demonstrate impressive skills in the examination. One key skill is the ability to think organically. Each essay should be treated as a unique piece, not just a collection of your best SAC's. While your exam should showcase the strengths and skills you've developed, each question requires a fresh perspective and new ideas. Allow yourself the space to think and apply your skills in new ways.

Looking back, my biggest regret in Years 11 and 12 was sticking to the career plan I made in Years 9 and 10. I didn't consider how I might change and grow, or that my passions and priorities could shift. I underestimated my abilities, and my course preferences didn't reflect my true potential. I ended up changing courses during second-round offers, which altered my entire plan. My advice? Don't be too cautious because you're worried about aiming too high. I never thought I'd receive DUX and the Premier's Award. I convinced myself those scores were out of reach, but I was wrong. I regret not having more confidence in my potential.

Now, I'm studying a Bachelor of Laws (Honours) at Monash University. It's challenging, but I'm proud to be pursuing a career I once thought was beyond me, one that opens many doors for my future.

I also want to acknowledge the valuable contribution of Michael Bennet, The Learning Area Leader-English. His support and dedication have been instrumental in helping students like me achieve our academic goals. His commitment to creating a positive and engaging learning environment has been greatly appreciated by both students and staff.

Sara Abu Asbeh, Class of 2023

DEADLY ASPIRATIONS DAY

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

Recently, students from Damascus College participated in Deadly Aspirations Day, an event aimed at inspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to pursue their goals while celebrating their culture. Held at Federation University Australia, the day brought together students from across the Central Highlands Area for a range of activities and workshops.

The day, themed 'Proud *Strong* Self Determined', aimed to empower students from Year 9 to 12 by introducing them to role models who have excelled in their fields. Organised by the Department of Education in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. and Federation University Aboriginal Education Centre, the event was a collaborative effort.

Students from Damascus College joined their peers in workshops and activities designed to foster social and cultural connections. The event also featured an expo with representatives from various universities, the police, defence forces, and the Western Bulldogs, providing insights into potential career paths.

Year 9 student Kyeema shared her thoughts on participating at the event: "It was great to see so many people come together to celebrate our culture and talk about our future. I felt really inspired by the speakers and learned a lot about the different opportunities available to us."

Ashleigh, also in Year 9 added, "The workshops were engaging, and I loved the bushfood workshop by Bridg from Saltbush Kitchen. It was a great way to connect with our heritage and learn something new."

The day also celebrated the achievements of Year 12 students, who were recognised for their hard work and dedication. The event concluded with a thank you to all the contributors, including Macaylah Johnson, a Wadawurrung Traditional Owner, for the Welcome to Country, and the Ballarat & District Aboriginal Co-Operative for their cultural experience workshop.

Damascus Year 11 student Billy, said of the event "Deadly Aspirations Day was a fantastic experience. Meeting other students and hearing from successful Indigenous professionals made me feel proud and motivated to pursue my own goals."

Deadly Aspirations Day 2024 was a success, leaving a positive impact on all who attended. It was a day filled with learning and a renewed sense of determination, highlighting the importance of community and celebrating one's culture and aspirations.

Sharon Lehtonen, Assistant Principal Catholic School Culture





CELEBRATING LOVE AND GRATITUDE: MOTHER'S AND FATHER'S DAY AT DAMASCUS COLLEGE

DAMASCUS EVENTS

At Damascus College, the arrival of Mother's Day and Father's Day is not just a date on the calendar; it's a heartfelt celebration that unites the community in gratitude and reflection. Each year, these cherished traditions are marked by a special Liturgy and a delightful breakfast, honouring the significant figures in our lives.

In May, the College transformed the Damascus Events Centre into a vibrant gathering space, welcoming over 300 guests, including students, staff, and parents, for the annual Mother's Day Liturgy and Breakfast. The morning began with a beautiful Liturgy, where students recited heartfelt prayers and readings. Principal Mr Steven Mifsud delivered a touching reflection on the unique and vital role mothers play in shaping our lives. A particularly poignant moment saw students placing their hands on their mothers' shoulders, a simple yet powerful gesture of gratitude for their unwavering support. Following the Liturgy, guests enjoyed a sumptuous hot buffet breakfast, complemented by barista-made coffee, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. The event also raised over \$1,500 through a raffle, with proceeds benefiting the Damascus Bright Futures Scholarship, thanks to the generosity of local sponsors.

As the seasons changed, so did the focus of celebration. The Father's Day Liturgy and Breakfast brought together another enthusiastic crowd, with Principal Mifsud warmly welcoming the community to honour the significant men in their lives. This event was not just about fathers; it celebrated all who embody the spirit of fatherhood. Led by students and supported by the Catholic Culture Team, the Liturgy reflected the Mercy Values central to Damascus College—compassion, justice, respect, hospitality and service. Following the Liturgy, guests enjoyed a delicious breakfast served by dedicated students, with expertly crafted coffee from VCE-VM students adding a special touch.

Both events exemplified the strong community spirit at Damascus College, highlighting the love and support that enriches the lives of all families. As the College community extends its best wishes to all mothers and fathers, these celebrations stand as a testament to the values of gratitude and recognition that define these special occasions. In a world that often rushes by, Damascus College takes a moment to pause, reflect, and celebrate the love that binds us all.





Senior Learning Precinct

MASTER PLAN UPDATE

A GROWING COMMUNITY

Damascus College is making significant progress with its ‘big build’ initiative, fulfilling the objectives outlined in its Master Plan. The construction of the Senior Learning Precinct is well underway and is on schedule for completion, with an anticipated opening in early 2025.

Situated away from the bustling front of the campus, this project is transforming into a modern three-level building and it boasts stunning views of our natural bushland setting and beyond. The facility will include 23 classrooms, student services, open gathering spaces, and state-of-the-art amenities to meet the diverse needs of both students and staff.

A standout feature of the new building is the internal staircase, which has now been poured. This staircase provides a light-filled connection between the upper levels and is complemented by a raised walkway that links to the rest of the campus.

Simultaneously, the College has received approval to explore plans for a Covered Outdoor Learning Area. The ‘blue courts’ area, which consists of four outdoor courts, is scheduled for resurfacing. This presents an opportunity to reimagine the space, making it more accessible as an all-weather facility.

The plan involves constructing a cover over this area and reconfiguring the court surface for multiple uses. This will include a fixed structure with a membrane roof and an additional infill covering the existing outdoor gym. The current freestanding hoops will be upgraded to side swing mounted hoops. As an outdoor classroom, the space will have the flexibility to be divided into two areas using a retractable net at the halfway point. The consultation phase is complete, and the design process is now underway.

In parallel with these projects, the College is establishing an innovative Year 8 campus at St Brendan’s in Dunnstown. The College is diligently working to meet the regulatory requirements for registration with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and the Victorian Catholic Education Authority (VCEA) to officially register as a campus of Damascus College.

With a history dating back to 1858, the College is proud to continue providing Catholic education on this site and looks forward to fostering connections with the Parish and the community. Planning and resourcing for this initiative are ongoing, with a projected start date in Term 2 of 2025.

Brett Holloway, Leader of Finance and Operations



Walkway to Senior Learning Precinct



Blue court concept
Image courtesy of Greenline



2024 Senior Team

SENIORS FOOTBALL GRANDFINAL

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

On Wednesday 19 June, the Damascus College senior football team faced off against Mercy Regional College, Camperdown, in the grand final of the BAS 2nd XVIII competition. The match took place on a chilly evening under the bright lights at Ballarat Grammar, setting the stage for an exhilarating showdown.

Under the astute leadership of coach Adrian Lane, the Damascus team had enjoyed a stellar season, building anticipation and excitement throughout the school community, particularly among the Year 12 students. The atmosphere leading up to the match was electric, with students and staff alike rallying behind their team, eager to witness a thrilling contest.

The grand final did not disappoint, as both teams delivered a gripping display of football. The match was a nail-biter, with each side matching the other's goals throughout the night.

Ultimately, Mercy Regional College edged out Damascus by a mere one-point margin, clinching the victory in a game that will be remembered for its intensity and competitive spirit.

Despite the narrow loss, the Damascus College team and their supporters have every reason to hold their heads high. The players demonstrated exceptional skill and determination, embodying the true spirit of sportsmanship. The healthy turnout of parents, staff, and students in the crowd was a testament to the strong sense of community and school pride that defines Damascus College.

In the end, both schools deserve commendation for delivering a spectacular game of football. The efforts of all involved, from the players to the supporters, have left an indelible mark on the school's sporting history. Well done to everyone who contributed to this memorable event..



Alex Johnson, Class of 1998

FROM LAB TO LAND, A SCIENTIST'S JOURNEY IN CONSERVATION AND REFORESTATION

ALUMNI STORY

I am a Scientist with a Bachelor of Environmental Sciences, and I've been working as a Research Coordinator since 2002. My role is diverse and dynamic, involving field surveys, analysing soil samples, and providing conservation advice, rather than the stereotypical image of a scientist in a lab coat.

I work at a non-profit research institute that specialises in translational environmental research. This means our work is directly applicable to conservation practices aimed at protecting and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity. Our institute's research covers a broad spectrum, from molecular ecology and genetics—such as identifying genetic changes that help species adapt to climate change—to studying ecosystems and habitats, understanding how native plants support local wildlife, and conducting field studies to trial new methods for habitat restoration. We even delve into population-level public health research, like linking urban green spaces with improved mental health.

My group's research focuses on the challenges associated with habitat loss. By gaining a deeper understanding of ecological

processes, we aim to identify targets for new or improved conservation strategies. We gather much of our data by measuring changes in biodiversity, soil health, water quality, and ecosystem services during restoration projects. While we are interested in the best ways to achieve habitat restoration, our primary goal is to understand why restoration brings about ecological benefits and whether there are alternative methods to achieve these benefits.

My passion for conservation and environmental protection was ignited during my undergraduate studies. Without being a qualified ecologist, I saw research as the best way to gain experience in this field of environmental science. I was enthusiastic and believed that educating people would lead to widespread excitement about conservation, ultimately solving the biodiversity crisis. I actively sought out researchers and environmental professionals, speaking to as many as I could. I even applied for a university position for which I was completely underqualified, just to have the opportunity to speak with the Professor who was hiring. Although I didn't get that job, the Professor remembered me and later offered me a position at the research institute.

This opportunity was invaluable—coordinating field research at a highly regarded institute. Initially, I was almost disappointed because, while I was working in habitat and biodiversity research, I wasn't involved in studies about sustainable agriculture and renewable energy. Instead, I was focused on reforestation, which I mistakenly thought was an easy solution for degraded ecosystems. I was naive and ignorant of the complexities involved. Reforestation is not an easy way out; it is a tool to help ecosystems recover, and without proper management, it doesn't even lead to ecological recovery.

My first year at the research institute was a steep learning curve. I learned to prepare ethics applications, perform field test procedures, record data, and understand the challenges faced by ecosystems. I gained insights into not only the ecological risks but also the human impacts that exacerbate these issues. I learned how these challenges might be overlooked by policymakers and how communities struggle to implement sustainable practices. I realized the importance of both a region's natural characteristics and human activities in determining ecosystem health. I also gained an appreciation for how difficult sustainable living can be when communities face economic challenges or lack access to green technologies.

As my understanding of this massive environmental problem grew, my perspective shifted. I came to appreciate that conservation is a complex issue. We will not achieve a healthier planet solely through better knowledge of ecosystems and biodiversity, although this is important. We certainly won't make progress by "shaming and blaming" those who contribute to environmental degradation. It's often said that being disparaging towards certain industries is the last socially acceptable form of discrimination. I now spend much of my time talking to friends, family, and strangers about what conservation and reforestation involve on a factual, ecological level. I share stories from study participants about their challenges and successes, hoping to spread understanding.

I'm more enthusiastic than ever about the area I work in. I hope our research not only contributes to improved conservation practices for those facing environmental challenges but also helps build a less prejudiced and more compassionate society.

Alex Johnson, Class of 1998



Alex Johnson in Tableland



CLASS OF 1974

REUNION EVENT

On Saturday 20 April Damascus College welcomed back the esteemed Sacred Heart College/St Martin's in the Pines Class of 1974 for a momentous occasion—their 50-year reunion. Hosted by Principal Steven Mifsud, the event brought together more than 20 past students, spanning decades of shared memories and experiences.

Held in the Damascus Events Centre, boasting panoramic views of the picturesque Damascus campus nestled amidst breathtaking nature and bushland, the reunion was a celebration of cherished friendships, lifelong connections, and the enduring spirit of the Damascus community. From 11 am in the morning until 2pm in the afternoon, the event unfolded, offering ample time for reminiscing and reconnection.

The formalities of the gathering were led by current College Captains Paris Govan and Lucas Wells, who warmly welcomed the alumni

in attendance. With genuine admiration, they showcased the bright and wonderful achievements of the current students, acknowledging the invaluable legacy left behind by the Class of 1974 and the more than 140 years of history that Damascus College proudly embodies.

Principal Steven Mifsud also took the opportunity to address the gathered alumni, sharing heartfelt words of appreciation for their enduring support and contributions to the school community. His words resonated deeply, underscoring the profound impact that the Class of 1974 had on shaping the ethos and values of Damascus College.

A highlight of the formal proceedings was a special video presentation, offering a nostalgic journey through the rich history of Damascus College. As images flickered across the screen, memories were stirred, and laughter and shared anecdotes filled the room, bridging the gap between past and present.

Among the distinguished guests was past staff member Sr Veronica Lawson, representing the Sisters of Mercy—the guiding force behind the school’s ethos of compassion and service. Sr Veronica delivered a heartfelt message from a notable member of the Class of 1974, Karon Donnellon, who, though unable to attend in person, sent her regards from Dublin, Ireland, where she now serves as the head of ISMAPNG. Karon’s message resonated deeply with her classmates, serving as a poignant reminder of the far-reaching impact of their collective journey.

Following the formalities, guests were treated to a delightful lunch, allowing for leisurely conversations and the rekindling of old friendships. The atmosphere buzzed with excitement as memories were shared and anecdotes swapped, weaving together the threads of their shared past as they took in the archives display.

A campus tour provided the perfect opportunity for guests to revisit familiar locations, from the hallowed halls of the former boarding house to the iconic statue of St Martin de Porres. As they traced their steps through the school grounds, a sense of nostalgia mingled with pride, reinforcing the enduring connection they held to their alma mater.

Throughout the gathering, one sentiment echoed resoundingly—the profound impact of their Damascus College experience. Their reunion served as a poignant reminder of the role they played in shaping the school’s legacy, laying the foundation upon which future generations would build. Their presence was a testament to the enduring spirit of community and the power of shared memories to unite across time and distance.

As the afternoon drew to a close, there was a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to reconnect, reminisce, and revel in the enduring bonds that had stood the test of time. The Class of 1974 departed, their hearts filled with nostalgia and their spirits buoyed by the knowledge that they would forever remain an integral part of the Damascus College family.

Are you a member of the Class of 1975? Planning is underway for your 50 year reunion happening in 2025. To ensure you have all the details and to receive your invitation update your details at damascus.vic.edu.au/community/alumni/stay-connected

Or email connecting@damascus.vic.edu.au





FINDING YOUR RHYTHM

ISABELLA COLEMAN

Hello! I'm Isabella Coleman, and I'm currently in Year 9 at Damascus College. As I reflect on my dance journey, I feel a sense of pride and excitement. I've been dancing for 11 years, having started this journey back in 2014 when I was just four years old. My goal is to continue dancing for at least 20 years.

Being the oldest in my family of four, I was the first to join the Damascus College community, and it has been a rewarding experience. This year, I had the opportunity to choose my electives for both semesters. In Semester 1, I selected Drama, Textiles, and Indonesian (which I'm continuing in Semester 2). I also decided to expand my interests by taking Art and Food. Art has become a special outlet for me; it allows me to express myself through painting and working with clay.

I do my dance training at Dancemakers, where I explore various styles, including Music Theatre, Acrobats, Pointe, Ballet, Flexibility, Hip Hop, and Contemporary. I dance every day of the week except for Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. It's a busy schedule, but I enjoy it. I've been part of the competition team for eight years, and I've tried different dance styles like Neo-Classical, Classical, Lyrical, and Contemporary. I'm also looking forward to starting a Hip Hop solo next year.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my dance journey is assisting a Contemporary class for children aged 5 to 11. It's inspiring to see how they express themselves through movement, just as I did when I was their age. As I often say, "Dancing isn't just about the steps; it's about expressing who you are."

Dancing has its ups and downs. On the positive side, it's a great way for me to release any negative feelings. Whenever I feel overwhelmed or stressed, I can turn to dance and let it all out. However, the downside is that I sometimes struggle to keep up with my schoolwork and assignments. Balancing dance and academics have taught me valuable lessons about time management, which I know will be important as I grow older.

One of my most memorable performances was when I landed my first role as the 'Coroner' in the Wizard of Oz in 2021, during Year 6. That experience was a significant moment for me and really deepened my passion for performing.

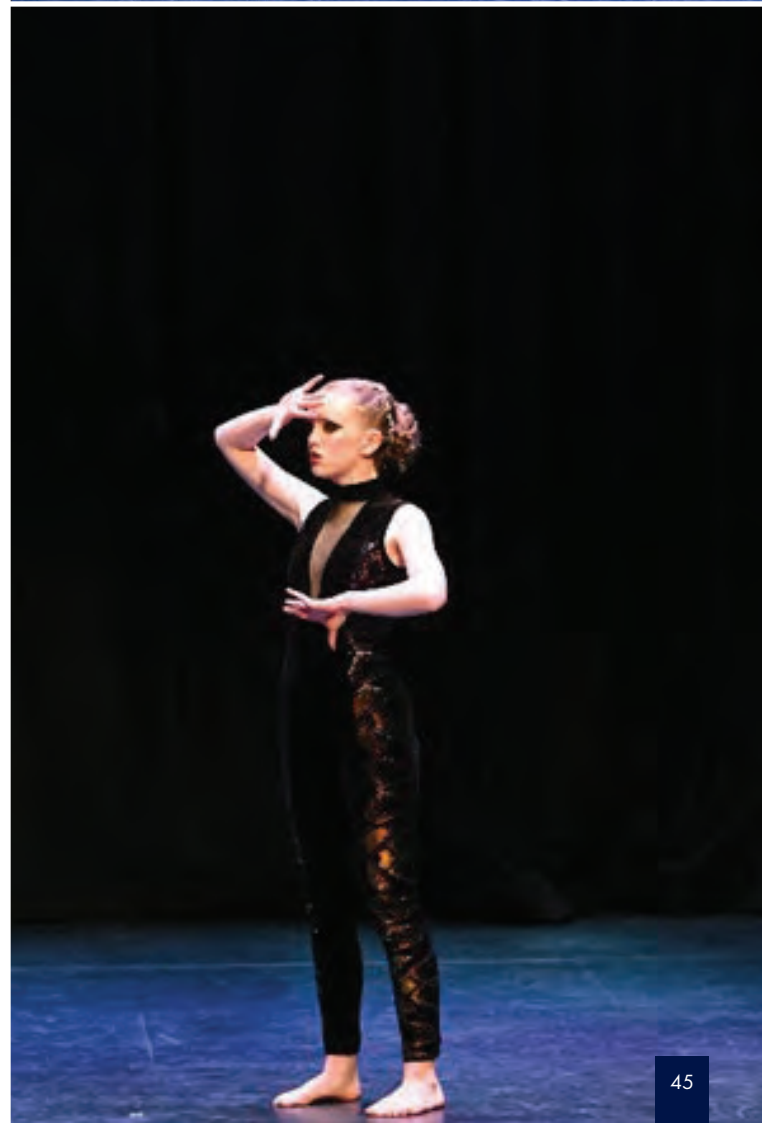
At the beginning of each term, I create a planner to help me balance my dance and schoolwork. I map out my schedule, noting when I can dedicate time to studying and when I can practice my dance routines. Once I have my planner, I photocopy it and stick it up in my room, the kitchen, and even in my dance bag. It serves as a constant reminder of my commitments and helps me stay organised.

If you're considering joining co-curricular activities, I encourage you not to overload yourself. I've learned this lesson through experience. It's essential to find a balance that allows you to enjoy your passions while also taking care of yourself. Remember, self-care is just as important as pursuing your interests.

In conclusion, my journey as a dancer and a student has been filled with challenges and achievements. I'm grateful for the experiences I've had and the lessons I've learned along the way. As I continue to dance and grow, I look forward to what the future holds. After all, life is a dance, and I'm ready to embrace every step along the way!

Isabelle Coleman, Year 9 student

Dance pictures supplied by Isabella Coleman





Bright Futures Panel

BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES

DAMASCUS EVENT

On Thursday 6 June, Damascus College hosted its annual Bright Futures Breakfast, reimagined this year as a Pathways Panel & Breakfast event. This gathering not only served as a platform for insightful discussions but also raised vital funds for the Damascus Bright Futures Scholarship, which provides 50% tuition relief to a Year 7 student facing financial or personal challenges.

The Bright Futures Scholarship is a significant initiative aimed at supporting students and families experiencing financial or personal disadvantage. Established in 2018, and sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy (John Thirsk Estate), Fr Brendan Davey, and Damascus College, the scholarship is designed to give students who demonstrate a strong commitment to social justice and community contribution the opportunity to access a Catholic education at Damascus College. This scholarship is awarded annually to one incoming Year 7 student and is valid for the duration of the student's enrolment, up to a maximum of six years.

The event welcomed a diverse audience of nearly 100 guests, including students, parents, and community members, all eager to engage with the panel of distinguished speakers. The morning began with a warm introduction, setting the stage for a series of inspiring talks that highlighted the importance of following one's passions in career choices.

One of the speakers was Dr Jason Kelly, a proud alumni from the Class of 1991. As a renowned researcher in pathology and cancer research at the Fiona Elsey Cancer Research Institute, Jason captivated the audience with his insights into the latest advancements in cancer research, particularly in the field of immunotherapy. His message resonated deeply, emphasising the importance of pursuing one's interests and the impact that passion can have on a career. Jason's engaging presentation not only informed but also inspired many young attendees to consider the possibilities within the scientific community.

Next on the panel was Adele Nairn, a graduate from the Class of 2000, whose career has been defined by her dedication to community leadership and regional development. Currently leading the Future Shapers program at the Committee for Ballarat, Adele shared her journey of embracing non-traditional educational paths, particularly through the Vocational Education and Training (VET) structure. She recounted her experiences balancing regular classes with work placements, highlighting how these practical skills have been instrumental in shaping her career. Adele's insights into the value of hands-on experience resonated with many students, encouraging them to explore diverse pathways in their own educational journeys.

The final panellist, Year 11 student Haileigh Buttigieg, brought a fresh perspective to the discussion. With a strong commitment to STEM subjects and active involvement in Girls in STEM initiatives, Haileigh's passion for science and her aspiration to become a neurologist left a lasting impression on the audience. Her determination to achieve her career goals while maintaining a healthy balance in her life showcased the potential of young students to make significant contributions to their fields. Haileigh's story served as a powerful reminder of the importance of perseverance and dedication in pursuing one's dreams.

Throughout the event, the panellists engaged in thoughtful discussions about the myriad career pathways available to students after graduating from Damascus College. Their diverse experiences and insights provided valuable guidance for attendees, reinforcing the idea that success can be achieved through various routes.

The Bright Futures Breakfast not only celebrated the achievements of its speakers but also underscored the importance of community support in helping students realise their potential. A heartfelt thank you to all who attended and contributed to this worthy cause, ensuring that the Damascus Bright Futures Scholarship continues to make a difference in the lives of deserving students.

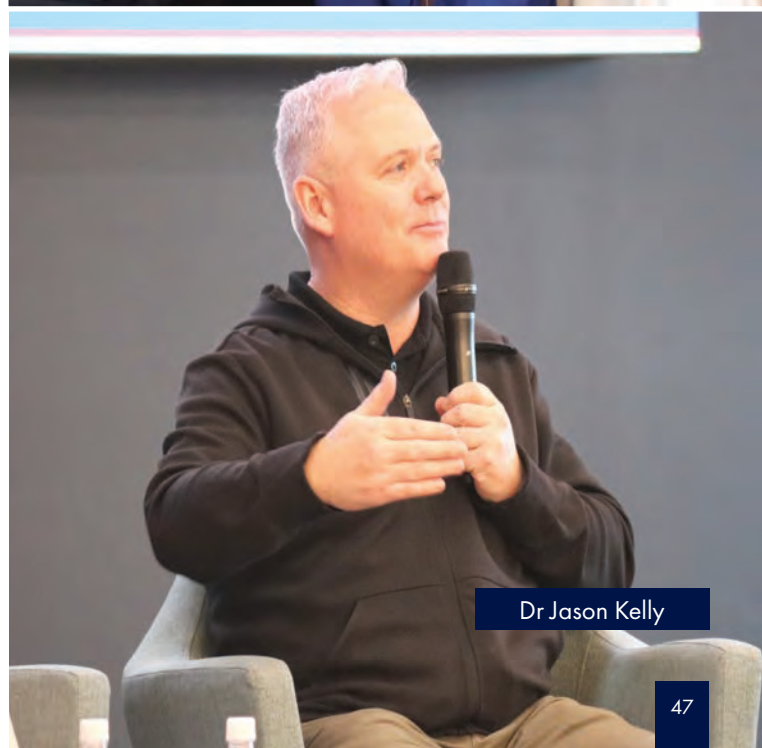
For those interested in applying for the Bright Futures Scholarship, applications open in early October, two years prior to commencement, and close in mid-February the year prior to commencement. More information can be found on the Damascus College website. This scholarship is an excellent opportunity for students who meet the eligibility and selection criteria to receive substantial support in their educational journey.. For more information visit damascus.vic.edu.au/enrolment/scholarships



Haileigh Buttigieg



Jason, Haileigh and Adele



Dr Jason Kelly



CFC Netball Final Match

EMBRACING OPPORTUNITIES AND EVOLVING IN THE SPORTING INDUSTRY

ALUMNI STORY

Since graduating from Damascus College just nine years ago, Bianca Litchfield Class of 2015 has established a distinguished career in the sporting industry. Driven by her motivation, openness to new experiences, and eagerness to learn, Bianca has embraced a range of opportunities at the Collingwood Football Club, gaining invaluable experience across multiple facets of the industry. Bianca has recently embarked on another role within the club, as she continues to expand her skill set and build a strong foundation for her ongoing professional development.

After completing her high school education, Bianca went onto study a Bachelor of Science at the University of Melbourne and upon gaining her degree she then furthered her studies and completed a Master of Applied Sport Science at Deakin University.

While living in Melbourne and attending university, Bianca encountered a pivotal opportunity that would shape her current career, an internship at the Collingwood Football Club. This chance arose thanks to a connection her housemate had within the club, which provided Bianca with a valuable contact and was the stepping stone onto the beginning of her career in the sporting field. Eager to make the most of this opportunity, Bianca embraced her internship role at a top organisation in the sporting industry, despite having no prior experience in the football or netball field. Instead, she focused on demonstrating her analytical and strategic thinking skills, which proved essential during her internship and her performance ultimately led to an opportunity to apply for a position within the club.

In 2020, Bianca commenced her career at the Collingwood Football club as the Netball Performance Analyst. Since then, she has expanded her expertise and gained further experiences and skills as a Performance Analyst across various areas of the club, including AFL men's, AFL Women's, VFL men's and VFL women's.

Bianca has recently taken on an exciting new challenge as the Magpies Sport Education Lead within the club's administration division. In this role, she looks forward to deepening her understanding of the business management aspects of the industry and explore the new opportunities that come with collaborating with partners like SEDA. Since starting, Bianca has enjoyed working in the social impact area, engaging with the various community initiatives within the club such as Magpie Nest Housing, Magpie Nest café, ReLink and the CFC Wheelchair team. Her passion for making a positive impact grew during her time in women's sports, and she is dedicated to continuing this important work.

During her time at Damascus, Bianca was deeply involved with the rowing team, where she developed skills in camaraderie, leadership, time management, and collaboration that she now applies in her career. She served as the inaugural Rowing Captain during the 2013/14 and 2014/15 seasons and was part of the first Damascus College team to compete in the Ballarat Head of the Lake Regatta. Bianca cherished her experience on the rowing team, noting that the bonds formed in rowing are unique, as success depends on working together as a cohesive unit.

Since graduating, Bianca has embraced a range of opportunities and challenges both professionally and personally. Her determination, ability to connect with others and eagerness to learn have contributed to her career successes thus far. In her new role, she continues to expand her skill set and grow, fully embracing the experiences and opportunities that come her way as she strives to become an expert in her field.

Bianca Litchfield, Class of 2015



Bianca Rowing in 2015



THE BROTHERS GRIMM SPECTACULATHON

DAMASCUS PRODUCTION

This year, the Damascus College Performing Arts Department showcased two dynamic school productions, each offering a unique theatrical experience. The first, a senior production featuring a cast of senior students, brought to life “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time”, The second production, featuring a cast of students from all year levels, was “The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon.”

“The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon” is a comedic play that takes audiences on a fast-paced, rollicking ride through all 209 of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales. The play features two narrators and an ensemble cast who attempt to recreate these stories in a wild and madcap fashion. The tales range from well-known classics like “Snow White,” “Cinderella,” and “Hansel and Gretel” to more obscure and bizarre stories. The production is characterized by its free-form comedy, audience participation, and a lot of silliness, making it a fun and engaging theatrical experience. A whimsical and fast-paced celebration of the classic fairy tales from the Brothers Grimm.

To provide a deeper understanding of the narrator’s experience and perspective in the show, they have responded to a series of questions.

Questions answered by Narrator, Zac Cripps

What made you want to audition for the show?

Damascus College shows really hold a special place in my heart. Regardless of themes, genres or stories, our shows always tell a great story; and are typically packed with laughs. As it is my last year at this school, I decided to audition so I could be part of one of these amazing productions one final time.

Which is your favourite fairy tale recreated in the show?

While all the fairy tales in the show are incredible in their own way, my absolute favourite would have to be our recreation of Hansel and Gretel. Without spoiling too much, the classic story is implemented with a very modern issue weaved in, making it clever and funny, but most of all; Hilarious!

What do you enjoy most about narrating the show?

While narrating the show is no easy feat, it is no doubt an incredible experience. My favourite part about it is definitely being able to see firsthand just how every story of the show unfolds in its own crazy way. The show is genuinely funny and being able to help present that to audiences is such a great experience.

Questions answered by Narrator, Zoe Newman

What sets this show apart from previous productions?

This show is different to previous productions because of the cast and everyone involved. We have a range of actors from Year 7 to 12 with varied levels of experiences. The premise of the show, performing all 209 Fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm also means that most actors have one or two roles that pop in and out of individual scenes. However, this doesn't stop the work as most of the cast have crew support roles that keep the show on its feet. The show is so much fun for both the actors and audience, so getting to enjoy the comedy and laugh together is something that really sets this show apart.

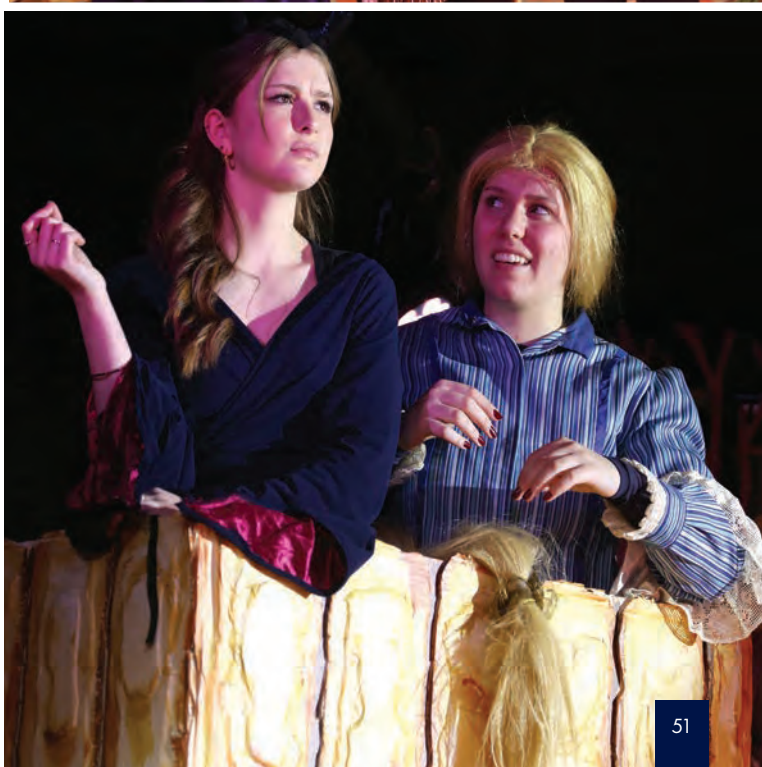
Which is your favourite character in the show?

My favourite character in the show is 'The Actor'. Without giving anything away the Actor has to take on several roles and does their best to keep the show going despite some bumps along the way. This creates extremely funny moments that align with the chaos that comes along with certain moments of the show. Some honourable mentions would go to Prince Charming and Little Red's Grandmother who truly bring the comedy.

What do you enjoy most about narrating the show?

I love getting to narrate the show because we get to link all of the stories together. We help it to make sense (in some ways) but also get to have so much fun. I also love getting to work directly with all of the actors from the cast as I feel we get to have our own special moment with each actor and their character onstage. It's so much fun to keep the audience engaged whilst enjoying the funny aspects ourselves.

The Damascus College Performing Arts presented a delightful re-enactment of The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon, filling the auditorium with whimsical characters, comedy, and adventure. The talented cast and crew truly brought this enchanting production to life.





Joan at her Class of 1970 Reunion in 2021



Joan accepting Birchip's Citizen of the Year in 2021

A LEGACY OF ENRICHING LIVES THROUGH MUSIC

ALUMNI STORY

Joan Glen OAM (nee Storey) was a beacon of generosity in her community, renowned for sharing her musical talents with everyone around her. Joan completed her senior schooling years at St Martins in the Pines and was a member of the class of 1970 cohort, after the completion of her Year 12 studies, Joan followed her passion and attended the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Growing up in the town of Wycheproof, after Joan married, she made Birchip her home, where she was a devoted mother of four and a beloved, active participant in both the local and broader community.

For over forty years, Joan generously shared her passion for music with the Mallee region, touching the lives of people of all ages. Her contributions and participation with music were far-reaching and impactful, from performing at significant community events like ANZAC Day, Australia Day, and weddings, to providing her skills at funerals and public and Christmas concerts.

Joan's dedication extended to supporting the local Birchip school, where she assisted numerous musical productions, fostering the creative growth of students. In her efforts to bring musical joy to the community, Joan founded and directed the Birchip Chocolate Sundaes Choir and served as the organist for the St Mary's Catholic Parish.

Additionally, Joan starred in and produced many musical productions with the Wycheproof Musical Society. Her profound love for music was evident in her unwavering commitment spreading joy through performances and sharing her skills within the community, Joan was not only renowned for her musical talents, but she was also known for her kind nature, ability to make everyone feel welcomed and included, and uplifting those around her.

In recognition of her remarkable contributions, Joan received significant accolades: in 2020, she was honoured as Birchip Citizen of the Year and in 2021, she was awarded the prestigious Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for her outstanding services to music. Sadly, Joan passed away before the medal presentation ceremony. However, her legacy was honoured when one of her daughters accepted the award on behalf of the family.

Joan was an inspiration to many, a beloved member of her community, her warmth, commitment, and musical prowess made her a cherished and integral part of the lives she touched.

Joan Glen OAM nee Storey, Class of 1970

With thanks to Anne-Marie English, Class of 1970 for assistance with the article

Photo courtesy of The Buloke Times

MATHS GAMES DAY

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

In August Damascus College Year 9 students participated in the Maths Games Day, an event hosted by St Albans Secondary College. Supported by the Mathematical Association of Victoria (MAV), this event offered young mathematicians from various schools the opportunity to engage in a day of challenging and enjoyable mathematical activities.

Representing Damascus College were Oscar Henderson, Logan Peplinkhouse, Ivy Storey, Dilana Romeril, and Emma Reed. These talented students demonstrated exceptional mathematical skills as they tackled a series of puzzles, games, and maths relays. The event was designed to foster a love for mathematics in a fun and collaborative environment, allowing students to develop their problem-solving abilities alongside peers who share their enthusiasm for the subject.

Logan expressed his pride in representing Damascus College, stating, "it was an honor to represent our school and showcase our skills. The event was incredibly well-organised, and it was a fantastic opportunity to learn and compete with students from other schools."

Emma also shared her appreciation for the event, saying, "participating in the Maths Games Day was a wonderful experience. The challenges were engaging, and it was great to see how well everything was run. I'm grateful for the chance to be part of such an exciting day."

Maths Games Days are celebrated for their ability to transform mathematics into an exciting and rewarding pursuit. They offer students the chance to enhance their mathematical thinking without the usual classroom pressures, encouraging creativity, efficiency, and teamwork. Participants also have the opportunity to win prizes and gain recognition for their efforts.

The students from Damascus College embraced the spirit of the competition, working together to overcome challenges and demonstrating impressive lateral thinking skills. Their participation not only highlighted their individual talents but also underscored the College's commitment to nurturing a passion for mathematics among its students. The College is proud of their achievements and looks forward to supporting their continued growth and success in the field of mathematics.





Andrew, Angela and their three children

THE VALUE OF AN INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTION

ALUMNI STORY

An intergenerational connection to education creates a unique opportunity for families to have a shared narrative during their high school years. Whether it be throughout common curricular activities, school traditions, teachers or experiences at camps or excursions, or accessing education based on the same school values and traditions, it can instil a special connection across generations.

For Andrew and Angela Staley, this intergenerational link is something that is shared among their family and is a tradition that they continue to build upon, as Damascus College was their choice for their children's education.

"We chose to return to Damascus for our children's education as the school provides co-educational learning based on Christian values. It's great to see our children develop friendships while learning at the same school and campus that we attended back in the 90's." shared Andrew and Angela.

Having met at Damascus College, both Andrew and Angela are proud members of the Class of 1999. Since their marriage in 2006, they have grown into a family of five, with three children: Archie 16, Xavier 13, and Evie 10.

Angela Staley (nee Henderson) is one of seven children in her family, of which all four girls attended Damascus College. Angela was a part of the final year of Sacred Heart in 1994 before transitioning onto the newly amalgamated Damascus College campus. Angela cherished the lifelong friendships she made at Damascus College and enjoys sharing the opportunities she had and memorabilia she keeps, with her children.

"I have a lot of fond memories of my time at Damascus and love telling our children the stories. In Year 11 textiles, I made my deb dress – which I still have hanging in my closet. Also in Year 11, my friend Lauren Bourke and I designed and produced our Year 12 jumpers for our communications project. I still have mine, along with a spare one sitting in a box at home. I am so proud of what we created and produced." shared Angela.

Throughout her time at Damascus Angela was grateful for the range of opportunities available after graduating and the support surrounding the different pathways. Angela currently works in Administration at a local Physiotherapist and Pilates studio, BodyBeGood and at St Francis Xavier Primary School as a Learning Support Officer.

Andrew Staley too has a rich family connection to Damascus College, he is the youngest of eight children, all of whom attended at least one of the foundational schools. Andrew's three sisters all attended Sacred Heart and St Martin's in the Pines and all four of his brothers attended St Pauls Technical College, with some going onto St Martins when it transitioned to co-education. Andrew was a part of the final cohort to attend St Pauls in 1994, he then headed abroad and attended St Mary's in Dubai for three years before returning to Damascus to complete his VCE studies.

During his time at Damascus College, Andrew appreciated the variety of education, of which sparked an interest into his career now.

"Damascus provided a well-rounded education including academic, sporting, and technical opportunities. Studying biology and geography in VCE lead me into studying environmental science at university and I still enjoy wood working as a hobby. I still have a coffee table that I made in David Boadle's woodwork class in 1997", said Andrew.

After graduating Andrew studied Applied Science at the University of Ballarat, and then went onto working as a hydrographer around Victoria and New South Wales for several years before returning to Ballarat to work in biosecurity – where he has now worked for the past 20 years as the Compliance Manager for the State Governments Biosecurity Program.

Now, 25 years after their own time at Damascus, Angela and Andrew recognise the significant value of the Christian-based co-education that the school offers. They feel it's important to provide their children with the same broad range of opportunities they once had.

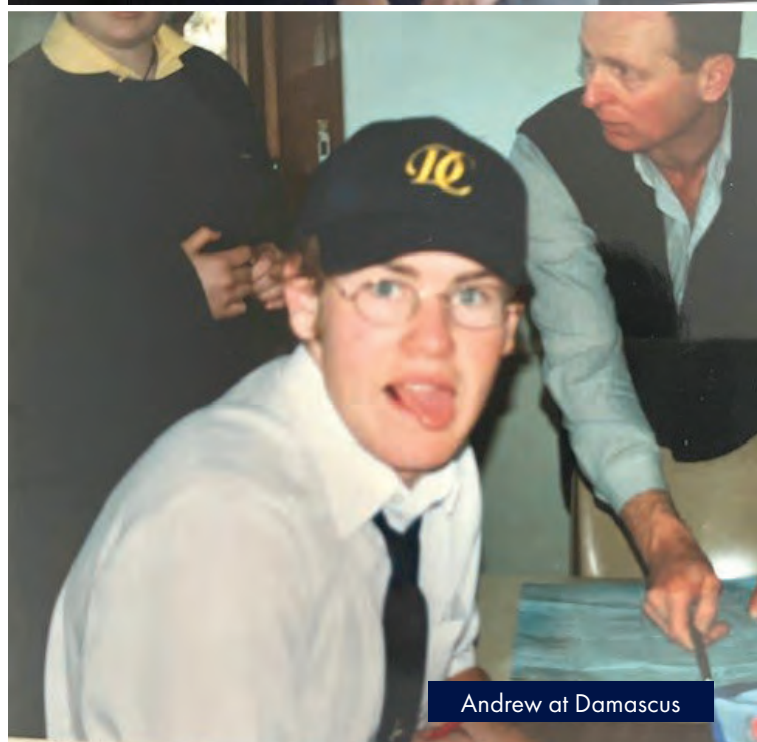
"Damascus and its foundational schools have demonstrated a strong tradition of producing confident and capable graduates over many decades. It has been great to see Archie and Xavier extend themselves into new leadership roles, presentation events and sporting opportunities while also being recognised for their academic efforts. They've developed new friendships, been challenged by school camps, and enjoyed getting involved in the wide range of opportunities that high school provides", shared Angela and Andrew.

As Archie, Xavier, and soon Evie attend the same College their parents once did, as a family they reminisce, bond over shared experiences and continue to build on the Staley family legacy at Damascus College.

Andrew Staley, Class of 1999 and
Angela Staley (nee Henderson), Class of 1999



Angela in Year 12, 1999



Andrew at Damascus



Angela in 1999



The Careers team

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THE CAREERS DEPARTMENT

A SERVICE FOR STUDENTS

When the time comes for students to select subjects or pathways that align with their post-graduation and career goals, the process can feel overwhelming. Whether it involves choosing subjects that meet university prerequisites, exploring work opportunities, crafting a resume, or evaluating potential career options as they near the end of high school, these important decisions can be daunting. However, with the support of the careers department, students can navigate these uncertainties and make informed decisions about their futures.

Located in the St Martin's Resource Centre, the careers department features a friendly team of three - Georgia, Allan, and Maree, who create a welcoming environment for all students. They offer a wide range of resources and support tailored to help students with their career and educational pathways. The assistance provided by the team is diverse and includes one-on-one appointments, classroom-based support, application guidance, facilitation of work experience opportunities, and subject selection advice, among other services.

One of the key cohorts that the careers team engages with during the important stages of pathway decision-making is Year 10 and Year 12 students. For Year 10 students, the focus is on establishing their senior schooling trajectory and aligning their education choices with future goals. In Year 12, the team provides individualised one-on-one appointments for each student, addressing any uncertainties, assisting with applications, and guiding them toward their post-school pathways.

Another key area of support provided by the careers department is helping students navigate subject selection. Each year, the careers department hosts a subject selection exhibition that assists students in making informed decisions aligned with their long-term goals. The expo runs over three days during lunchtime, allowing students to visit various subject and learning pathway stalls. It also provides an opportunity for students to speak with teachers and explore all available options.

The careers department also facilitates Year 10 work experience, giving students the chance to gain insight into industries or jobs of interest. Before students approach businesses, the careers team equips them with essential skills for seeking work experience opportunities, including how to communicate effectively over the phone call or writing professional emails. During student's time in work experience, the careers team and teachers observe students stepping outside of their comfort zones and gaining first-hand exposure to the workforce, which helps develop problem solving abilities and enhances social and emotional skills. Often, by building relationships during work experience, students find themselves presented with future employment opportunities.

Helping students re-engage with their education is another important aspect of the support provided by the careers department, whether through seeking alternative educational streams or by exploring work-based opportunities. The team is there to offer personalised support for any student who may feel disconnected from their current learning environment, and they work closely alongside them to explore options that align with their interests and strengths, encouraging students to stay engaged with their learning and have a positive educational experience

The careers team is always available to provide guidance to students at any year level. Their comprehensive approach ensures that students feel equipped to make confident and informed decisions, with a commitment to each student's long-term goals, the careers department plays a vital role in helping students navigate their futures and educational journeys with assurance. By offering tailored support and resources, they empower students to explore their options and pursue paths that resonate with their aspirations.

The careers team can be contacted at:
careers@damascus.vic.edu.au



Alan and student in careers space



Subject selection exhibition



Demi Schaper and her art piece



Justin Weyers, Class of 1994 and staff



Nicholas Shillington and art piece

HUMAN CENTRED

VCE VISUAL ART & TECHNOLOGY EXHIBITION

Once again, Damascus College proudly hosted its annual VCE Visual Art & Technology Exhibition at the Damascus Events Centre, this year embracing the theme 'Human-Centred'. Principal Steven Mifsud warmly welcomed students, staff, family, friends, and members of the Damascus community to this vibrant celebration of student achievement.

The exhibition showcased over 50 folio pieces, each a testament to the hard work and creativity of students across various disciplines, including Visual Communication & Design, Media, Systems Engineering, Textiles, Wood, and Art. This event not only highlighted their artistic talents but also their dedication and innovation.

A highlight of the evening was the special guest speaker, alumni Justin Weyers from the Class of 1997. Now the Creative Director at PictureThinking, Justin shared his inspiring journey since leaving Damascus. His engaging talk explored the role of emerging technologies, such as AI, in both aiding and challenging creative processes, offering valuable insights to students and staff alike.

Throughout the school week, the exhibition remained open, allowing students and staff to immerse themselves in the diverse array of artworks. An estimated 1,000 visitors were inspired by the creativity and skill on display, making the event a resounding success.

Congratulations are due to all the students for their remarkable efforts, supported by the dedicated staff from the Arts and Technologies departments. Their collective hard work and passion have once again made the exhibition a memorable and inspiring event for the entire Damascus community.



1985



1995



2005



2015

2025 REUNION DAY

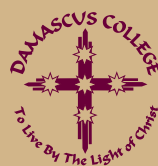
We are thrilled to invite you to the 2025 Reunion Day, where we will celebrate the remarkable journeys of the Class of 1985, 1995, 2005, and 2015!

Join us as we honor our proud history and recognise our foundation schools: Sacred Heart College, St Paul's Technical College, and St Martin's in the Pines.

Mark your calendars and save the date!

SATURDAY 29 MARCH 2025

Invitations will be sent out in early 2025, so please take a moment to update your contact details.



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