the mirabel foundation

# Mirabel Newsletter

#### December 2020 Issue 34

This year has been challenging and heartening in equal measure. The pandemic was especially hard on vulnerable families already at risk of social isolation, and carers, usually grandparents, were deemed the most vulnerable to this virus.

Despite the myriad challenges, the whole Mirabel community adapted quickly in finding new ways to stay in close contact. As social restrictions became increasingly difficult, the resilience of children and carers shone bright. And throughout, the generosity from our supporters, volunteers and donors has been overwhelming. It really has felt like 'we were all in this together' and it has been incredibly reassuring to realise that even when people were going through their own problems they still thought about Mirabel. Thank you so much!

As this trying year draws to a close, it's wonderful to know that connection, hope and belonging can be communicated in even more ways than before and that the compassion in our community is a mighty force.

Jane Rowe - Founder/CEO



"Family is supposed to be our safe haven. Very often, it's the place we feel the deepest heartache. When I see my grandparents, I look at them with so much admiration and love. They took my siblings and me into their home when we were just little babies... It used to hit me hard when I'd hear people talking about their parents – I could never relate and truth is, I've never known what it feels to be part of a non-broken family. But when I think about my life now, I know how lucky I was to be taken out of that situation and shown so much love and affection.

When I watch my grandpa sit and talk to my brother, who has a very high needs disability, all I see is love in his eyes. It makes everything we've all gone through seem like nothing, and all the anger and the pain just goes away. To think that these people didn't have to take us in but chose to love us and give us everything they could possibly give, fills my heart. To think where I've come from and where I am now, I'm so damn proud of myself... we were one of the lucky bunch that was given a second chance at life.

There's a hole in my heart but it's slowly starting to heal. When all is said and done there's nothing more powerful in this world than love... do not let this world make you hard, do not let pain make you hate and do not let the bitterness steal your sweetness."



Courtney, 21-year-old Mirabel Alumni

## **Mirabel Online Learning Club**

It's said that necessity is the mother of invention, and when the world shut down in 2020 we had a sudden and urgent need to stay connected with Mirabel kids while maintaining social distance. And so – with the help and patience of volunteers, tutors and Mirabel families – Mirabel Online Learning Club was launched. This has been an enormous success, and being able to stay in touch has buoyed the whole Mirabel community this year.

#### Here are a few testimonials from participants.

66 Danielle has been a joy to mentor. She shows up with so much enthusiasm and starts each session sharing what has been going on in her week. Danielle has recently been diagnosed with reading challenges and we spend a lot of time playing games that involve spelling or reading to build her confidence. Over Zoom we may share an electronic whiteboard (Danielle is far more tech savvy than I am!!) and play 'hangman' or write a very funny story, each coming up with a sentence to add and I help with any spelling. Sometimes if I can sense Danielle is tired from a busy week, we draw a picture each and show each other over the camera so Danielle can spell the new word. We usually finish off reading. Danielle's wonderfully animated story telling makes me laugh. It is as if she is performing in a play and her willingness to have a go even though she is not sure of the spelling or how to pronounce the word warms my heart each week. Danielle has shared how her reading level is going up with school tests and I hope I can continue to build her confidence and a love for learning. ?? Feedback from Amy (volunteer tutor)



66 I like playing games with Amy. She is fun and she listens to me read and helps me learn to spell words. I love playing games with her! ?? Danielle (Mirabel child)

**66** I was extremely worried when Danielle, aged 10, was confirmed to have dyslexia just as lockdown started. Not only was I struggling with home-schooling, but totally floundering trying to work out what to do to help her. As an only child, she struggled without friends to play with and completing school work alone. That's when the wonderful Mirabel team came into action. She started having Zoom tutoring sessions with Amy. Danielle really looks forward to these sessions. At a recent meeting with her school, I was shocked to hear her reading level was now up to the end of year standard. Her writing and spelling have shown improvement too! I am so incredibly grateful to Amy and the Mirabel team. They have helped Danielle through a time where everything seemed to be going wrong for her and gave her a little sparkle in the darkness of lockdown. **99** 

Gina (Grandma & Mirabel carer)

### **Reaching Out to Male Carers**

Male carers often stay in the background and don't attend support groups, so in October we launched our first ever dedicated Mirabel male carers support group. The idea is to provide a dedicated, relaxed and inviting forum for men to get together and chat about what's going on in their families, to share stories and advice about the practical aspects of kinship care, and to generally support one another. Our first few sessions have allowed us to focus on men's mental health and discuss support available. It is also a great opportunity for some social contact away from the continual demands of caring. Bruce, a new carer from rural Victoria, summed it up when he said, 'My wife made me come along but I'm really glad I did – I never knew there were other blokes out there going through the same stuff as me.'

## Help support the Mirabel Foundation

#### Donate online at mirabelfoundation.org.au/donate

#### Therapeutic Children's Groups

It was very exciting to see our Newcastle Girls Groups return to faceto-face groups this month. We asked the girls to paint 2020 as a year, and these beautiful paintings are now hanging proudly in our office.



#### Sharing the Christmas Spirit with Mirabel

For most of us, Christmas is a time when we're surrounded by family. A time to celebrate together. To gather at a festive table and to give and receive gifts. Happy times to remember.

We believe every child deserves a happy Christmas and to experience the joy of opening a gift chosen especially for them, to enjoy a delicious meal with family who love them, and to look forward to a fun and safe holiday with their family. Your gift can light up a child's face with happiness this Christmas. Donate online at mirabelfoundation.org.au/christmas

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