

Casso-Be-Wary Student Action Team

Students at Sydney Road Community School (SRCS) have a long history of working, as part of their curriculum, in **Student Action Teams (SATs)** around issues of personal and community concerns.

In these teams, students bring something that they are passionate about to the school, research it, and then develop and implement plans to try to make a difference to the world in this area. (See more details about SATs at <https://bit.ly/2REBDb7>)

Sydney Road Community School is a small, fully Government funded public secondary school in Brunswick in Melbourne. This school of 115 students has a long history (since 1972) of progressive, student-centred education. Three of its students, Will, Tara and Owen, recently described its approaches:

"We are able to offer more individualised learning compared to many other high schools. With programs such as our re-engagement classes – safe spaces for students who find going to school difficult – and the inclusion of our therapy dog, Sydney, SRCS makes sure that every student's needs are met – no matter the circumstances. Along with this, we also provide flexibility for students who may be disadvantaged, have specific learning needs or are facing difficult home situations.

"However, despite our size, we still offer students common pathways including both VCE and VCAL. This means that throughout all secondary school years students can receive the help they may require.

"Our school's small size puts us in a very unique position when it comes to how the school is run. Teachers are able to work closely, and often one-on-one, with students to make sure that they are getting the best education possible. At our school, the majority of spaces are shared. Teachers have no offices and there is no staff room, meaning that they are always available if needed and the idea that everyone is equal is typical of our strong culture."

Student Voice and **Student Action** are at the centre of how the school works. Late last year, three of the students, Georgia, Gene and Medea, addressed a group of teachers and principals at the **Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership** about student voice and the impact student feedback has had on their teachers and classes.

The students spoke articulately about their position within the school, the respectful way in which they were treated and the ways in which they were consulted on aspects of teaching and learning. They explained how this was an incentive to come to school and a motivating factor to put in their maximum effort.

There are several **Student Action Teams** operating within the school – around **Community Environment, Animal Wellbeing** and so on (as well as a **Parent Action Team**). These can form and change according to needs and interests, and the **Student Action Teams** are recognised as part of the curriculum.

Animal Wellbeing Student Action Team

Recently, the SRCS **Animal Wellbeing Student Action Team** has been working to support the initiatives of **Rainforest Rescue**. The project began when the **Animal Wellbeing Team** was researching how to best look after the school's resident chickens.

In a student-led class discussion, students went from identifying chooks being connected with dinosaurs (dinosaurs being a science focus for the

juniors from earlier in the year) to then a senior student bringing the students' focus to cassowaries being '**chicken-like but from the dinosaur era**' ... and from there – the group's imagination **boomed**. They unanimously decided they wanted to learn more about the humble cassowary.

As the teacher involved, I could see this leap from chickens to cassowaries as an example of 'levels' of focus, in which a project's context has '**Levels/Scales**': **local** (school based); **regional** (external to school but within Australia); **global** (international and beyond). We were able to go to the



CASSO-BE-WARY
Sydney Rd Community School

'regional' level of engagement - interstate with **Rainforest Rescue** being based in Queensland - and also engage with 'local' community supports outside of the school in Brunswick.

As a teacher, it was like wildfire to watch the spread of enthusiasm and trust within the group and it was just a magical concept that really engaged the students.

The students discovered that the cassowary – an amazing Australian bird that evolved in dinosaur times - is becoming endangered as its natural environment is being threatened. The group also heard about the development of a **Cassowary Habitat Support Fund**, which is trying to raise funds to buy back part of the Daintree Rainforest to conserve this habitat.

The group was immediately interested. Alongside this obvious need, the students recognised that they also needed to educate people about the cassowary, and change assumptions that they were dangerous and harmful. Students decided to run a community event to inform and educate the school community and to raise funds (through a raffle) to contribute towards the habitat purchase. A target of \$100 to \$150 was anticipated – which would buy up to 30 square metres of rainforest. The day was finally run on 3rd September this year.

The group had to go through a lot of planning and organising to make the event happen. The students liaised with community members, writing letters to local businesses including Brunswick Woolworths and Bustop Shoe Repair

on Victoria Street to organise raffle prizes. They wrote to School Council and completed the documentation necessary for school approval of the event. They sought and got advice from the school office staff on where to research the most up-to-date information on how to run a raffle event legally and to be compliant with regulations - which one of the students successfully managed.

Here are two accounts from students who were involved in the **Student Action Team**, showing what they did and what was achieved:



The idea to raise money for **Rainforest Rescue** came from one of our students, Owen Munday, who is very passionate about these brilliant birds and determined to show everyone that they are not the violent or deadly animals that people assume they are. The planning that went into this event was focused on the **Rainforest Rescue** organisation and what it is they have done and continue to do for our dear cassowaries.

One obstacle that came up during the planning phase was acquiring the permission to use **Rainforest Rescue's** name and logo in our advertising and overall event. To overcome this obstacle I sent multiple emails to the site provided contacts and eventually got sent the paperwork for permission. After filling it all out with the help of our event organiser and wonderful teacher **Emily Dalkin**, I sent it back and within

a few business days we were granted permission.

Working in a **Student Action Team** is great; there is a lot of communication and professional organisation skills to be acquired that will be very useful in future careers.

Our goal in the beginning was to raise \$100 to \$150 for **Rainforest Rescue** and we were all in the mindset that we might barely achieve that. After the event and a few very generous donations we ended making over \$500 which was mind blowing and such a massive prideful moment for our group, it made us all very happy and gave us the motivation and confidence to do another event, this time for our school chickens, in the future. I believe our group did a wonderful job on the entire event and I can't think of any way for us to improve.

Kailee



The **Casso-b-wary** event was held on the 3rd of September from 5pm until 6pm. It was a successful event with a great turnout and lots of raffle tickets sold. The Hall was full with a diverse range of people, including staff, students, family and friends. Angelo from Melbourne Zoo was our special guest speaker - who is an expert on birds. The event included a raffle, student artwork for sale and Angelo's presentation about cassowaries.

Our student project was a success on many levels. We reached and exceeded our project objective of raising \$100 to \$150 for **Rainforest Rescue**

who work towards protecting the Daintree Rainforest (the endangered cassowaries' habitat).

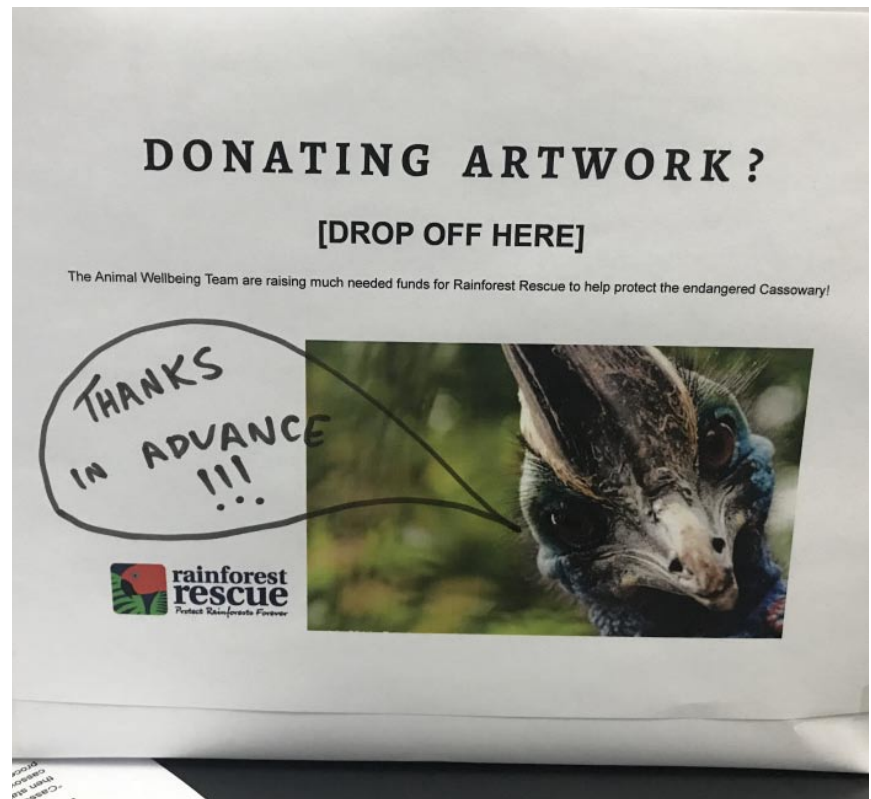
I contributed to the project by helping make cardboard cassowaries, assisting with team decision-making through democratic processes and collaborating on ideas, as well as being a positive and encouraging teammate. I find working in the **Animal Wellbeing Team** (within the **Student Action Team** framework) enjoyable and empowering, because I engage in as well as contribute to teamwork and I am inspired by my peers.

Asher

Reflections

Through this process, we saw the group joyfully brainstorming, working and communicating as a team, researching and consolidating ideas (including voting - the embodiment of democratic processes ... very much the Humanities Civics/Citizenship curriculum focus and embedded practice here at SRCS), writing a proposal to the **Student Representative Council** for seed funding, planning and marketing the event, delegating tasks, setting and meeting deadlines, and conducting an evaluation and celebration after the success of the event.

From a teacher's perspective, I could see the skill development occurring





throughout the process, particularly in the ways in which decisions and actions became connected. For example, the group voted on and agreed to a research phase to see what threats the cassowaries currently faced and what supports already existed. As a first step, they decided on a group viewing of a documentary that focussed on cassowaries in Queensland that were impacted by Cyclone Yasi in 2011. They then discovered *Rainforest Rescue* and contacted their office via email to cement a collaboration.

We were able to build textured conversations into class-time about *'sustainability', 'conservation' and 'ethical decision-making'*, as well as *'legacy of action'* – to be able to look back when they're older and see a map of Australia with the mighty Daintree and know they made an impact to help conserve the sacred rainforest for the benefit of an endangered species. These were wonderful conversations for the students to engage in, with real world application.

I was also inspired by the way in which the multi-age forum of the school's SATs structure worked, with students from across Years 7 to 12. Senior students used their prior knowledges to help fuel the vision of endless project possibilities for junior level or new students. For example, through the research, a senior student offered the suggestion to make a site-visit to the Zoo or Healesville to see a cassowary in real-life. Then the 'education and awareness building' came about when another student suggested we locate a keeper or expert to come talk to the students about cassowaries. Sticking with our Community ethos, this then broadened to the idea of an event that would create an opportunity for

all parts of the school community to access the unique knowledges on offer. And this led to Angelo, a long-term zoo-keeper from Melbourne Zoo, saying yes to visiting our school and sharing his expertise and experiences in caring for cassowaries, in conjunction with a raffle to raise funds for *Rainforest Rescue*.

As teachers, we could see a massive shift in student self-efficacy in project development, community networking and ability to raise revenue. For a community group from a school that has no financial fees/costs, this was a massive initiative. We finished up raising over \$500, and exceeding the target was a real measure of the support and belief that students developed. It takes a true community to do this.

But as important for us as the achievement of our practical goals was, it also showed how a student-led and student-driven **Student Action Team** approach can meet multiple curriculum goals in the areas of:

- **Critical/Creative Thinking Capability**
- **Personal/Social Capability:** collaboration and self-management
- **Ethical Capability**
- Links to **Entrepreneurial Characteristics** in the **Business/Economics** umbrella of **Humanities**
- **Budgeting:** financial mathematics
- **Literacy:** proposal writing outcomes

The approach can be very powerful, not just for a mammoth fundraising effort, but for community networking, developing transferable skills in project-



Students are the centre of everything we do at our school.

We are renowned for the close, respectful, supportive connections between students and staff and for our efforts to create a sense of belonging and success in every student.

With the exception of compulsory VCE exams, we do not have competitive assessment or competitive ranking of students and avoid these practices unless they are mandated.

Our school has a tradition of excellence in equality, diversity, individuality, community and student safety.

SRCS is committed to the idea of accessible education for all, which means that we have no fees, no book lists, no uniforms and the cost of camps, excursions and senior subject materials are kept to a minimum.

School Statement

management and teamwork, and inspiring fellow students, parents/carers, staff at the school.

It really reminded us of the Margaret Mead quote: *"Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have."*

Contact:

For more information, contact:

Emily Dalkin
emilydalkin@sydneyrdfs.vic.edu.au

or see the school's blog entry at:
<https://bit.ly/2INBi1X>