

Unsung Heroes

There is a small army of unsung heroes around the College who, often out of the sightline, perform their work with enormous commitment and professionalism. That wonderful band of medical staff who operate the Health Care Centre is one such group whose constant ministrations to the boys responds at the deepest levels to the Ignatian principle of *cura personalis*; that is, responding to the needs of each and every boy as they are made manifest. And, those needs may surface throughout the course of the school day or in the case of boarding, in the middle of the night. I was reminded of this during the week when I received one of many emails of gratitude from a parent, thanking Leanne Neal and her team for the medical management of a boy who was concussed at a training session. Few would be aware that the Health Care Centre accounts for over 10,000 admissions each year involving the full range of medical presentations, from scrapes and abrasions to mental health, broken bones, chronic disease management and major tissue damage with associated rehabilitation. So effective is the care in the Health Care Centre that Sydney University has taken out a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the College as a practicum placement for nurses in the undergraduate and Masters paediatric program. To Leanne Neal and her faithful staff, many of whom volunteer to support the Ignatian Children's Camp later in the year, I offer a statement of sincere thanks on behalf of the school community for the indefatigable service that is rendered with good cheer and unconditional generosity. In the words of St Ignatius, they 'give without counting the cost'.

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Images: Health Care Coordinator, Leanne Neal and Registered Nurse, Meg Board

Another layer of support that enables the College to carry out its mission is the gardening and maintenance staff who take so much pride in the grounds and facilities. Those who enter the College are reminded on a regular basis that the ovals are always in prime condition, the gardens the object of constant attention, upgrades and maintenance applied to heritage buildings in constant need of them: like the upkeep of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, it is a relentless and sometimes thankless task. And like the demands of the Health Care Centre, it is not confined to office hours. When facilities are needed be that day or night, weekday or weekend, those who stack chairs, prepare facilities, prune shrubs and trees, clear debris after storms, line ovals, facilitate parking and the list goes on, come to the fore to ensure that the school's needs are accommodated with personable spirit and amiable support.

Perhaps one more area that merits mention in its own right is the counselling, library, admin and support staff who operationalise the College's infrastructure. We are blessed with a dedicated and capable counselling staff who respond to the boys' multifarious personal needs and career ambitions, many of which surface spontaneously and often require urgent action. The gracious manner in which those in the library go about their daily duties, often responding to some 'left field' inquiries associated with rare texts and resources, is a veritable window into the boys' world and their challenges. And to the many who account for student attendance, who manage finances, who facilitate all manner of documents from testimonials to reports, I offer a statement of sincere gratitude. The proactive volition of those who give so much to the College community should never be assumed: it is a great gift.

Images: Some of the hardworking crews who remain behind the scenes

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distinctively Ignatian way. Beginning with mass, Fr Jack gave a personal insight into the spirituality of St Ignatius, before the boys moved off to their respective service activities all over Sydney. Faith, service and scholarship form the bedrock of the educational program and each were cause for acknowledgement and celebration on a day that commemorated the 461st anniversary of St Ignatius' death and the extraordinary gift that the Society of Jesus has been to the world. In the case of the latter and the context of this statement, readers may find Chris Lowney's wonderful publication entitled Heroic Leadership, an anthology of leadership from a Jesuit perspective, worth reading and absorbing at this time.

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Wednesday night in the Ramsay Hall saw the HSC Music Concert, and what a stature music has in the life of the College. Admittedly, some of the best talent in the school was on display but it was at times grounding to be mindful of the fact that these men of tender age, despite their extraordinary proficiency with instrumentation and voice, are still at school. They have taken their music to exceptional heights, thanks to the gentle and supportive encouragement of Dev Gopaldasamy and a talented group of teachers, but their efforts are in due proportion to their innate talent, discipline and commitment to an expressive art form in which they become alive through their passion. Congratulations to all on the consummation of years of dedication and the proficiency which has been the corollary of it.

Every so often it is valuable to step back and offer a statement of appreciation to those who give so much to the boys and the wider College community. 'Unsung heroes' could be regarded as an exaggeration; I think not. It is a proper acknowledgement of the invisible space that is occupied by so many whose lives of dedicated service in a school context sit outside of the frenetic activity in classrooms and around the grounds. In gratitude, may I say thank you to you all.