

bestchance assisting on the Road to Recovery

In February 2009 areas of Victoria experienced the worst bushfires in the country's history. Many of our **bestchance** clients, families and children, staff and volunteers knew people in, or had association with, affected areas, bringing the tragedy very close to home. How could we help when we were located outside the immediate area?

The answer was to respond to specific needs relayed by community agencies already located in the fire areas. Volunteers in our Community Support program immediately answered the call by combing our Recycle Room for suitable clothing, bedding, towels, linen, toys and essential household items. New books and toys for children were given with the aim of quickly regaining some sense of normality. We collected disused mobile phone chargers for people who still had a phone but no way of recharging the battery.

Financial assistance and counselling were offered to people temporarily moved into our locality. Additional Commonwealth Emergency Relief funds were channelled through **bestchance**, enabling us to respond to requests as diverse as Ventolin inhalers, free public transport vouchers and temporary housing assistance. As part of the ongoing bushfire recovery process our Community Support program now has 12 months funding to specifically assist those directly affected by the disaster.

Staff, families and children did whatever they could in a variety of ways....

The children of **bestchance** Cheshire School raised money through the sale of their handmade Valentine's Day cards and cupcakes. When the students learned that many pets suffered in the fires, they extended their fundraising efforts to purchase items such as dog leads, bedding, pet food and bowls.



The staff of **bestchance** arranged events such as a 'Gold Coin Casual Dress Day' and one staff member even vacated her house so that three bushfire victims could move in. Many other staff volunteered their time and energy towards specific community emergency relief efforts coordinated by other agencies.

The bushfire emergency response again demonstrated how **bestchance**, as part of the wider community, can adapt to meet the immediate needs of people in difficulties. The goodwill and efforts of our staff and volunteers and the financial support of our donors make this possible, and we thank them all.

More information: support@bestchance.org.au

From the CEO

Our Newsletter, issued only twice per year, is the main way that we stay in touch with the many supporters who generously contribute to our work, a means to tell families using our services about some of the highlights of our broader activities, and a way to engage the wider community in what we do.



I am writing this message very aware that many of our regular donors and potential supporters are facing 'tough times' and have already stretched their budgets to help individuals and communities affected by the disastrous 'Black Saturday' bushfires. Many charities and community organisations are struggling to maintain services and activities, while demand increases as a result of job and other financial losses.

We can only trust in our supporters that you will continue to be inspired by the opportunity to assist children and families to develop to their potential, and give whatever you can afford. Here at **bestchance**, we are continuing to do all we can to stretch the dollars as far as possible in provision of services, appreciating the tremendous assistance of our many volunteers.

In this issue of the Newsletter, we have some highlights from recent activities, continue with our 'Parenting Skills' articles to assist readers to understand the practical application of the research on which **bestchance** programs are based, and give some ideas on ways that people can help us to support their community, including a flyer for the great-value 'Entertainment Book' that we sell as a fundraiser. We hope you find this issue interesting.

As we go to press, our staff are engaged in reviewing some exciting recent developments in early childhood services. **bestchance** was selected as one of a handful of organisations to pilot a 'transition to school' program for children with additional needs and has been funded by Government to undertake a review of kindergarten clustering. We look forward to reporting on these initiatives and other highlights in our next issue.

Lodi Francesconi



Oh what a difference ...

In the last week of November, 2008, a young man, a visitor from Sydney, came to Cheshire School 'to help out around the place'. His name was Josh and he impressed with

his engaging personality, winning smile, thoughtful words and willingness to take on whatever was needed.

Could anyone believe that this might be the Josh who came to Cheshire School in 2003, the child diagnosed with ADHD, medicated to the hilt, condemned to a sugar-free diet, fighting the world and losing the battle with himself and everyone else? A sporting boy who should have been enjoying Grade 5 with his mates in a mainstream school, but was instead consulting numerous medical professionals trying to understand why he was so, in his own words today, 'Terrible!'

It was! And the difference was amazing...

Josh the young man well recalls the problems that brought him to Cheshire.

'I just didn't think – I reacted, angrily and violently. I found it hard to have friends. My school said that they really couldn't deal with me, that I needed help.'

Josh's Mum found Cheshire School and, after some teething problems coming to grips with the standards expected of him, Josh began to learn about managing himself. But that didn't end his personal challenges.

He had only been at Cheshire School for 6 months, enjoying new friendships in the playground, when the breakup of his parent's marriage prompted his Mum to take him back to family in Sydney. His Mum was distressed to realise that there was no similar school that could continue to help Josh the way that Cheshire had, so he moved directly back into mainstream for his final year of primary school. In Josh's words 'I slipped back, but somehow the message was in my brain to stop and think, and deal with things without using violence.'

Josh moved on to secondary school with that message still in mind, and he says that progressively, he didn't really have to think

about it anymore – it became second nature to manage himself. He credits the staff of Cheshire and the loving support of his Mum for giving him the opportunity to change. 'They all taught me that it's not medication that changes you; it's you that has to change you,' he said. What a message, and what a team!

Today Josh is doing well at school, on the soccer field and in his personal life, with a group of good friends. He has a quiet confidence that tells you he knows who he is, where he's been and where he wants to go. His current career goal is to join the Police force, because he believes it will be interesting work and will give him the opportunity to be useful in the community.

Reflecting on his week assisting the Cheshire staff, Josh grinned as he described some of the behaviour he had witnessed in the playground. 'Looking at those boys, I see just what I was like when I came here,' he said. Cheshire helped to change Josh, and it was a great joy to the Cheshire staff to have his involvement, albeit for a short time, to help work that change on others.

More information:
cheshire@bestchance.org.au

Sailing their way into confidence at Cheshire

The students of the Cheshire School have an opportunity to go on many excursions during the year. These excursions, a vital part of their curriculum, make learning fun and provide opportunities to demonstrate their improving ability to take on responsibilities for their own behaviour that they may not have been able to accept previously.

Recent great adventures for both Cheshire classes, relating to their curriculum topic of 'The Sea', included sailing 'The Enterprize' on Port Phillip Bay, followed by a trip to Maru Koala and Animal Park, near Phillip Island. Not to overlook 'Pirate Pete's Mini Golf' at Maru with a course where they encountered all sorts of obstacles from thunderous waterfalls to life-size Pirates.

The sailing ship, a replica of a vessel built in 1829, was a highlight for the students given jobs of coiling ropes, keeping look out and helping the crew hoist and set

the sails, not to mention steering the ship. 'The Enterprize', run by a not for profit Trust, was built by a small team of craftsmen and many volunteers. The project took 8 years from planning to completion and is a tribute to the enthusiasm and generosity of all involved, providing challenging experiences from history to those who have the opportunity to sail on her.

The children of Cheshire School had the following to say about their time on 'The Enterprize':

'We went on a boat, I liked going up and down. We saw some jellyfish. I had the best day.'

'I liked the waves. We went in the cabin. We saw jellyfish. I coiled the ropes. We looked for the buoys so we didn't crash into them. It was a really good day.'

'We hopped on the ship and said 'hi' to the 'nice pirates'. Then we started. I was

very excited and so were the other kids. When we were right out we pulled on the rope and tried to pull it down. Later we got to look downstairs where there were bunk beds and also a table. This was awesome!'

Children who come to Cheshire are generally disengaged from learning, and excursions help them build enthusiasm for the everyday program. Activities are carefully planned, many with the specific aim to provide opportunities to learn new skills and feel a sense of accomplishment that raises a child's self-esteem. Of course, they are also about having a good time with friends.

More information:
cheshire@bestchance.org.au

'The Enterprize' is a replica of the 1835 ship that brought the first white settlers to Melbourne.

Parenting Skills: Children learning through play

For children in their early years, play is an essential part of learning. Curiosity is the driver. They are on a quest to find out how things work. When we unnecessarily say 'no', we are restricting the exercise of natural curiosity and the development of physical skills, self esteem and confidence.

Playing with a child is one of the delights of parenthood, and also one of the key elements of the child's healthy development. There is much debate about when a child is 'developing' and when they should begin to 'learn' but one thing is clear: whether it is 'development' or 'education', opportunities for play are vital and, providing they are appropriate to the child's age, they really can't begin too soon.

Research has shown that a child's environment and experiences, particularly during the first three years, strongly influence their development and, as they grow, their self esteem and ability to cope with whatever life may throw at them. Positive experiences, such as enjoyment of play, listening, looking, touching, tasting and smelling, help a child to learn about the world. When parents and family join in, the child feels loved and valued.

Early childhood professionals in child care and kindergarten services are increasingly conscious of the concept of play-based learning. There is a decreasing emphasis

on continuity of structured activity and more time for 'freeflow' play. This doesn't mean that the carers or teachers now have less work to do. In fact, they need to be very observant to ensure that curiosity and experimentation doesn't lead to harm, and to seize opportunities to use the children's play to enhance their experience. A child may have lined up five pieces of wood, so what better opportunity to count together to five, then take one or two away?

As parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and family friends, understanding, fostering and involving ourselves in child's play will have a significant influence on the development of the child we love, not to mention doing wonders for our own temperaments. The following are a few ideas for play with different age groups.

Newborns and Babies: Babies respond to our proximity, touch and tone of voice. As eyes focus, babies learn from our facial expressions and the objects we give them to see and touch. From 6-9 months, let them become aware that they can see themselves (and us) playing 'peek-a-boo' in front of a mirror. Time with them demonstrates our love and dependability, bonding us in the relationship that we aim to continue through life.

Toddlers: Enjoyment is overrun by frustration as junior objects to your attempts to keep him or her safe, which he or she regards as you getting in the way of the quest to find out how things work. Try playing with a touching bag – a variety of small objects in a bag that the child can put a hand into – and then talk together about whether the object is warm or cold, soft or hard, smooth or rough. Stacking and removing building blocks together can teach simple counting and maths. Discovering the different sounds of various plastic containers filled with sand, water, pebbles, pasta, etc can lead to 'music making'. Have fun!



Pre-schoolers: Here's the chance to pretend to be 3 or 4 again! Junior is learning to play 'seriously' with other children and you can join the group, or just be the single playmate. Look for opportunities where junior can be leader but also those to be follower. Encourage safe experimentation, even if it's a bit messy, and ask why or how 'that' might have happened and what might happen if we did it differently?

Early childhood can be a really fun time. Enjoy!

More information:
earlyyears@bestchance.org.au
and www.raisingchildren.net.au
which we acknowledge for some of the material in this article



Leaving a Bequest: You could leave a lasting legacy and help to ensure the well-being of children and families into the future. If you would like more information, please call us on 8562 5100.

Supporters hoist sails and scan the progress at the Children's Centre

Two new colourful shade sails have been erected in the **bestchance** Children's Centre playground thanks to a generous donation of \$2,000 from the Maroondah District Y2K'ers Masters' Group, Freemasons Victoria and the Old Scotch Collegians Lodge, combined with a grant of \$5,000 from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The new structures address a pressing need in hot summer months for playground shade and contribute to a safer, more creative playscape for the children in the Early Childhood Intervention, Kindergarten and Child

Care programs. The shade sails provide 98% UV protection, minimising the risk of sunburn and therefore the incidence of skin cancer in later life.

Contributions from groups such as the Freemasons, Service Clubs, churches and church auxiliaries to the provision of facilities allow **bestchance** to provide engaging and stimulating play areas and equipment in our programs. Some of our children come from disadvantaged backgrounds and benefit greatly from the feeling of security in the Centre and access to interesting play based programs. Parents have the opportunity to observe and consider the way children play, which potentially enriches their parenting.

The Glen Waverley Uniting Church was one of many community organisations that, in 2006, made significant



donations to the establishment of the **bestchance** Children's Centre, providing resources for the Early Childhood Intervention and Helping Hand (now Parent and Child Support) programs. Members of the Church congregation recently visited **bestchance**, observing first hand how their support has made a difference.

*If you would like to visit the **bestchance** Children's Centre, please phone us on 8562 5100 or email community@bestchance.org.au.*

A public Open Day is to be held Sunday 25 October as part of our Children's Week celebrations.



Valuable ways to help make a bigger difference

Interested in further ways to help? Every kind gesture to help us strengthen and extend **bestchance** services to children, families and the community is warmly welcomed.

There are many ways you can help to make a bigger difference through **bestchance**:

- Make a donation or pledge (donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible)
- Make a memorial gift – 'give in memory' of a loved one
- Donate towards a scholarship for primary aged children to access the services of our Cheshire School

- Include us in your will
- Donate goods or services
- Volunteer your time – join our **bestchance** volunteer team
- Setup a workplace payroll giving program with your business (Donations made from pre-tax income provide the benefit of an immediate tax deduction for employees)
- Hire **bestchance** meeting and training rooms, or new purpose-built community and business function room
- Fundraise with us – participate in a fundraising event such as our

upcoming **bestchance** Dinner Dance on the 16th October 2009 or run your own fundraising activity

- Purchase an 'Entertainment Book' from **bestchance** (we receive \$11 per book)

These invaluable forms of assistance will be used towards furthering the work of **bestchance**, directly assisting children and families in the community.

More information: community@bestchance.org.au or phone 8562 5100.

bestchance offers a range of early intervention, development and support programs for children, individuals and families. Further information can be found at bestchance.org.au

Early Intervention

- Early Childhood Intervention
- Parent and Child Support

Child Care and Kindergarten Services

- Long Day Child Care
- Sessional Care
- Kindergarten
- Kindergarten Cluster Management

Primary Education

- Cheshire School

Youth and Adult Programs

- Vocational Training
- Community Education
- Foundation for Homeless Youth
- Community Support

CHILD FAMILY CARE
bestchance

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Making a difference in your community

Privacy Assurance. **bestchance** abides by the Privacy Principles contained in the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 and the Victorian Information Privacy Act 2000. Any Information you provide will be held securely and your privacy respected. For further information please telephone 8562 5100.

