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## FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

### BENNELONG FOUNDATION SUPPORTS BIG DAY OUT FOR MIRABEL CHILDREN

50 children enjoyed a day of excitement at Luna Park as The Mirabel Foundation held its Big Day Out on Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2009. A regular fixture during the school holidays, the Big Day Out provides entertainment to children aged 8 to 17 who have been orphaned or abandoned due to parental illicit drug use. On the 14<sup>th</sup> January, 50 children were taken to Luna Park to enjoy an action packed day of free rides, activities and lunch.

The Bennelong Group helped make the Big Day Out the success that it was by giving staff a day out from their normal duties to volunteer. This was the inaugural "Make a Difference Day" a new initiative introduced by the Youth Committee of Bennelong Foundation. Through Make a Difference Day, staff from the Bennelong Group become more directly involved with the Bennelong Foundation, trading one day in the office for a day helping one of its many charities.

Bennelong Group's CEO, Alison Watkins, is very supportive of the volunteer programme for Bennelong Foundation – "Many of us joined Bennelong because of the Foundation and Make a Difference Day is all about enabling us to connect directly with the causes Bennelong supports. Knowing that the Foundation provides a financial contribution to Mirabel is motivating, but having the opportunity to make a personal contribution and a personal connection takes our relationship with Mirabel to an entirely different level. At the end of a really rewarding day, I found myself wondering who was really helping who in our relationship with Mirabel. I hope my well-intentioned efforts made a difference for Mirabel, but I know for sure the kids and staff I saw that day really made a difference to me."

Over 20 Bennelong employees attended in support of The Mirabel Foundation and Make a Difference Day, taking on tasks including chaperoning children around the park, preparing food and generally ensuring all had a fantastic time.

Several employees share their experience –

Ciaran McAssey, Director, Distribution, Bennelong Funds Management –

"When I think of making a difference to a charitable foundation, most of the time the thought is complete when the direct debit form is signed, or the cheque handed over. The Mirabel Foundation Big Day Out at Luna Park really showed me, what making a difference really means.

To roll up to Luna Park and seeing the children waiting for the gates to open was actually pretty daunting, how do I interact with the kids? What do I say? Well fear not, that got swept away when the gates opened and the kids want you to go on all sorts of rides. They talked about their pets, their favourite movies, they talked about themselves and they could be themselves, they could be kids.

Sometimes I got to see a look in some of their eyes that told me why days like this are so important, and organisations like Mirabel are so important. Unfortunately all good things come to an end and 4.00 p.m. rolled around, quicker than I could ever think, and the kids were picked up by their carers, to head home and wait for the next day that they could get together with the Mirabel Family. To be honest, I loved the day, the way it was organised, the people involved and most importantly, the kids, I just hate the fact that these kids have been exposed to things kids shouldn't be exposed to. I also have resolved to help out not just financially but by helping out on similar days when the opportunity presents itself, that is what making a difference really is about."

Helen Woodward, Bennelong Group –

"The Mirabel Foundation Big Day Out, for me, was a day of contrasts –

The forecast oppressive heat swept away by a cool change; delightful sunshine and cool breezes – a talisman for a day of carefree fun for the children. Colleagues, concerned, hearts heavy with the knowledge of the heartache and burdens our young charges carry, delighted as the day progressed to be making a difference in the lives of these children by participating in this magical day.

Children's eyes, witness all too often to tragedy and destruction, now sparkling with excitement and mischief. Young people, often burdened at an early age with the role of carer, just being kids, being cared for, safe and free to have fun, their childish needs met – even ten rides in a row on the ghost train! Adults and children, strangers at the start of the day, reaching out to each other, sharing confidences, some so sad, others inspiring, buddies by day's end.

The frustration with all the paperwork and red tape. The satisfaction and appreciation to have been fortunate enough to share in this day. A big thank you to all who made this day possible. Bring on the next one!"

Jay Doherty, Financial Accountant, Bennelong Group –

"The Mirabel day at Luna Park was a fantastic experience with perfect weather, great kids and plenty of fun. It was extremely rewarding to see the big smiles on all the kids' faces as they enjoyed each and every ride in the park. I am sure all of the volunteers from Bennelong would agree that the day was well coordinated and a huge success. I look forward to being involved in more of these events as a member of the Bennelong team."

The Mirabel Foundation was established in 1998 by Jane Rowe to assist children who have been orphaned or abandoned due to parental illicit drug use and are now in the care of extended family (kinship carers). It is the only organisation in Australia specifically targeting this vulnerable group of children. Bennelong Foundation have assisted Mirabel with two grants; \$30,000 in 2005 for the Breaking the Cycle project and \$30,000 in 2008 for the Families in Crisis Emergency Support Programme.

Events such as The Mirabel Foundation's Big Day Out offer time to children whose circumstances do not often allow them to enjoy a normal childhood. In this environment, children can take a break from their problems and make friends with others who share similar experiences.

Jane Rowe, Founder and CEO of Mirabel Foundation advised –  
“Thank you so much for your support at Mirabel's Big Day Out at Luna Park. Your generosity in donating your time and energy goes way beyond anything we could ever have expected. The feedback from the children and their carers has been overwhelming. We believe it was Mirabel's most successful Big Day Out ever, due largely to the enthusiasm with which Bennelong's staff participated.

Your involvement with our Recreation Programme is deeply appreciated, and on behalf of everyone at Mirabel and all the Mirabel children, our heartfelt thanks.”

There are many opportunities for staff from Bennelong Group to volunteer time and expertise to the organisations that we support. You can either refer to newsletters posted on the website for the organisations we fund, or contact me for specific interests you have and I will find an organisation that suits.

Our next Make a Difference Day is scheduled for Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2009 at Cottage by the Sea in Queenscliff – the Bennelong Celebrity Surf Day – which will include people like Cathy Freeman, Geelong and other AFL footballers, surfing stars, etc. Volunteers are required for the day and if you would like to attend, please let me know. Cottage by the Sea are anticipating that the children involved in the camp that week will be those affected by the recent bushfires in Victoria.

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