

**FOSTERING LOVE OF AND PRIDE IN AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP****OAA STUDENT AWARDS 2010****17 Nov 10**Introduction

Good afternoon Ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to you all, particularly to the representatives of St Francis Xavier College, Radford College, Merici College, the Black Mountain School and Kaleen Primary School.

We are here this afternoon for the second annual presentation in the ACT of the Order of Australia Association's Student Awards for Citizenship and Community Service.

Before presenting the Awards, I would like to tell you a little about the Association and the thinking behind the Awards. I would also like to share some thoughts with you on Australian citizenship and community service.

Order of Australia Association

Who or what is the Order of Australia Association?

We are an Australia-wide organisation of people who have received an award in the Order of Australia. You can therefore be sure that every Member of the Association has carried out some particularly meritorious act of service to the Australian community, and has had that act publicly recognised by their award. The common bond between our very diverse membership is service to Australia, or putting it another way, proven good Australian citizenship.

With such a membership, you won't be surprised to know that the Association is focussed on the theme of good citizenship, and we include amongst our several objectives these two:

“ – to foster love of and pride in Australian citizenship.” And

“To promote good citizenship by example, by encouragement and by awards to individuals, institutions and organisations”

And that of course is the purpose of our Student Awards, and that is why we are here this morning.

### Citizenship

Our object is to promote good citizenship, but what do we really mean by those words “good citizenship”?

Most of us would be pretty sure that we know what good citizenship is and would recognise it when we saw it, but most find it hard to describe it precisely. Something to do with “doing the right thing by the community” perhaps, but can we get a bit more specific?

Yes we can. A commonly accepted definition of citizenship is being a member of a political community (in our case, of Australia) who enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership.

This is alright as far as it goes, but we know that Australian citizenship is a good deal more than simply enjoying rights and meeting obligations. We are fortunate to live in a society with a particular and unique quality of its own – different to all the others - a society where the majority of people consciously or unconsciously embrace a set of values we sometimes refer to as the ANZAC spirit. This is because the World at large first recognised these values as distinctively Australian through the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF fighting on Gallipoli, in Palestine and in France in World War One.

I am talking about things like the idea of a Fair Go – that everyone deserves a reasonable chance to make their way in the world, free of class or other impediments. And of Mateship – the idea that we are all Australians and part of the team, and we stick by our mates in hard times, particularly those worse off than ourselves. And of a certain Irreverence for Authority for its own sake, and until that authority has proved itself worthy.

And the important principle underlying each and all of these three is the moral obligation to help those less fortunate than ourselves. This line of thinking has led us to an ideal of citizenship that goes well beyond rights and obligations, and we call it Active Citizenship.

### Active Citizenship

Active Citizenship is the idea that citizens should work towards the betterment of their community through public service, volunteer works, and other such efforts to improve life for all citizens.

We think it is an excellent concept, and it is the ideal of Australian citizenship that the Order of Australia Association embraces, and in which we wish to foster Australians' love and pride.

There are many ways in which you can be an active citizen and contribute to the public good. It will often mean working unpaid in your otherwise spare time. It may involve helping out with charitable works, or contributing to community development by organising, leading or taking part in community organisations. It is necessarily voluntary – something you do not by compulsion but by a sense of moral responsibility to be a good citizen. And the good news is that almost everyone finds that they receive a deep sense of personal satisfaction from this, far exceeding the effort they have put in.

### Today's Awards

Our Student Awards are intended to encourage Active Citizenship by publicly recognising worthy examples in our schools and colleges. We hope this will encourage those involved to continue the good work, and also encourage others to follow their example. But we also have a deeper objective, and that is to develop in today's students, who are tomorrow's citizens, a genuine understanding of the practice of active citizenship and voluntary community service.

It gives me great pleasure to tell you that today we are going to recognise four outstanding examples of real Active Citizenship in action.

In a few minutes, Dr Ray Newcombe will read out the citations and I will make the awards, but first let me tell you something about the winners.

### Phoebe Davies

Our first Individual Award goes to Miss Phoebe Davies of St Francis Xavier College. Phoebe is an outstanding young woman finishing Year 12, who is passionate about social justice issues and ending poverty, and who has shown she can voice her concerns eloquently and diplomatically.

She is a natural leader – a house leader and one of the main student leaders of the Young Christian Students movement at the College. She is a senior member and the main driver of the school group, chairing meetings, organising gatherings and events, and directing the focus of the group.

In her concern for the poor and disadvantaged, Phoebe has shown herself to believe in a fair go for all, and is an outstanding model of Active Australian citizenship.

### Meritorious Group Activity – Radford and Merici

This year we have decided to make two awards in the “Meritorious Group Activity in Community Service and Citizenship” category. These will go to Radford College and Merici College. Both of these schools are doing outstanding but separate work with the disadvantaged students at Black Mountain School. This is a secondary school in O’Connor for students requiring a special education program and facilities, and encourages students to develop their maximum potential and be as independent as possible.

Since 2008, **Radford** has provided a Team Support Class and a Community Involvement Class to work collaboratively with the Black Mountain School students in a whole range of activities, including social and emotional development, sporting activities and individual learning goals.

Importantly but not surprisingly, this has proved an enriching experience for both the Radford and Black Mountain students as genuine friendships developed through shared experiences and relationships. I want to quote to you an email from a teacher at Radford to BMS.

“Dear BMS Friends,

The boys from both classes returned to school today somewhat transformed. I’m not sure what is going on but these visits are opening eyes, hearts and souls. I am constantly in awe of the friendship of our schools and what it is doing, hopefully for you guys as well as us.”

At the same time but separately, a group of girls from **Merici** has also been working with students from Black Mountain School in what has also become a very positive relationship and on-going partnership of benefit to both schools.

Throughout this year, 38 Merici students have attended a Black Mountain class for one and one half hours each Monday.

They integrated into the class forming relationships with staff and students, and became familiar with alternative communication systems. They have assisted in many ways including with hydrotherapy programs, serving meals, developing communication and social skills, physical activity, gardening, hospitality and self care. The hospitality activity has led to highly commendable planning to perhaps employ BMS students post school in the canteens of local primary schools.

We were impressed that both Colleges, Radford and Merici, realised that there were real benefits to their own students as well as to those at BMS, in that the work they have been doing has been helping to build young peoples' values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning. Society is going to benefit by having these students as future members and role models towards building a more inclusive Australia.

While Black Mountain School has not been nominated for an Award, we thought it important to acknowledge formally their part and the wonderful attitude of the School towards encouraging friendships and partnerships between those who have a disability and those who do not. We propose to do this with a special Certificate of Commendation.

#### Meritorious Group Activity Kindergarten to Year 10 – Kaleen Primary School

Last but by no means least the award in the Group Category Kindergarten to Year Ten is to go to Kaleen Primary School for the great efforts of the Kaleen Kangas Skipping Team.

This is a skipping team of nine girls and five boys from Year 6, who perform under the banner of the Heart Foundation, and whose aim is to promote health and well being within the school and the wider community.

The skipping team does displays and gala days at Kaleen Primary as well as visiting other primary schools and other local organisations including Seniors Gala Day, Canberra Community Walks and Raiders and Brumbies home games.

The team puts in much effort training and preparing for these events, and over the past two years has raised over \$8000 for the Heart Foundation.

### Conclusion

I congratulate Phoebe Davies, Radford and Merici Colleges and Kaleen Primary School on their Awards. We are proud of you and the wonderful ongoing demonstration you have given of that active Australian citizenship, which we love and in which we can take justifiable pride. I have no doubt your efforts will prove an inspiration to others.

It is now my pleasure to present the Awards.

General Peter Gration

Canberra

17 November 2010