



St Anthony's Family Care

HEART matters



Easter 2021



An Update From Our CEO



Dear Friends,

The start of 2021 was warmly welcomed by all as we held renewed hope for a better year than the previous.

Despite the many challenges presented in 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic, I am pleased

to say that the St Anthony's team remained firmly committed to the needs of service users and operations continued undisrupted throughout the year.

Despite our initial expectations that demand for services may reduce due to parents' anxiety and fears of the virus spreading through the community, what we experienced, to our surprise, was a month on month increase in requests for services.



Inside our new Admin Centre

Having the opportunity to access services at St Anthony's was a great relief for families and enabled children to be engaged in meaningful activities whilst their parents could commit to necessary functions within the home.

In order to meet the increasing demand, we have been recruiting and training additional staff members for the various services. This staff recruitment is currently continuing as we look to grow our team in preparation for the new St Anthony's Village which is due to be completed by the end of April 2021.

It is with great thanks to our many supporters and donors that we will be able to offer beautiful, purpose-built facilities for children and young adults with disabilities.

In May 2020, Stage 1 of the development was completed, and we opened the new Figtree Early Learning Centre. The centre has been very well accepted by the community and everyone that enters is in awe of its fabulous indoor and outdoor learning spaces.



Kitchen – One of the three houses for accommodation

As the usual weekly routines for many changed and we saw parents working from home, children learning from home and access to the community greatly diminished, pressures and stress levels for many families increased.



Outdoor playspace front of Activity Centre





Front perspective Monash Parade

At the end of April, we will be opening four additional buildings for our Disability Services – three houses for short term accommodation and an Activity Centre. With this, we will also open a new Administration Centre.

We are already seeing a lot of interest in the houses with many families keen to book their child in for overnight care. Not only do parents enjoy a break from their caring responsibilities but their child is able to focus on developing some independence by spending time away from the family home and participating in their favourite activities.

The Activity Centre will be accessed by children with disabilities after school and on weekends for group-based activities. The centre offers a large multipurpose indoor space, a functional kitchen, breakout room and a safe and secure outdoor yard.

To better meet the needs of young people aged 18-25 years, we have established a new service called 'Forge – Shaping the future for young adults'. For several years, we have been continuing to support school leavers beyond the age of 18 years, however, there was no specific

program which tailored to their needs in an age-appropriate way.

The new Activity Centre will provide a great venue in which we can work with this group to focus on social skills, independence – such as cooking, cash handling and use of public transport; whilst providing opportunities for participating in the community.

We are looking forward to the coming weeks when we officially open the new St Anthony's Village and are able to offer a greater range of services to a larger number of children and young adults.

Thank you for your continued support and we invite you to visit our new village in the coming months.

May the renewal of life at Easter bring new blessings of love, hope, peace, good health and happiness to you and your loved ones.

Joanna Najdzion
Chief Executive Officer



Big Strides for Little Feet



Hi, my name is Elpida and I'd like to share my story with you.

When you have a baby, your mind takes you on a journey. Immediately you start to think about what your child's life has in store for them and how you, as

a parent, can help to ensure that your children have every opportunity in life.

In January 2018, my husband and I along with our daughter, Olympia, who was 4 at the time, welcomed our twins Dimitri and Marissa to the world. Our small family of three, instantly became a big family of five. Having twins was a challenge on its own, but we were so excited to be growing our family, that we took this new adventure in our stride.

We watched as Dimitri and Marissa grew together, but as they are twins, we soon realised that Dimitri was not achieving his developmental milestones quite as quickly as Marissa. Wanting to help our son we started seeking support services and made an appointment to see a Developmental Paediatrician. In October 2019, Dimitri was diagnosed as having a Global Developmental Delay (GDD) and so began our visits to Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Speech Pathologists, all in an effort to help Dimitri work towards his developmental milestones. My mind began to race, what would his life be like? How could I help to ensure my son was able to achieve his goals and be a happy little boy?

After a year of therapies, Dimitri was making some progress, however we knew that with the twins soon turning 3, it was time to start looking for a childcare centre. We knew that with Dimitri's special needs we required a service that was able to provide some targeted early intervention for Dimitri but was also able to provide the inclusion we wanted so Marissa was also able to attend the same centre. Luckily, we

already knew about St Anthony's Family Care and as it turned out, they had just opened their fabulous new purpose-built Early Learning Centre, Figtree.

Any parent gets a little nervous about sending their children to childcare but knowing that Dimitri had low muscle tone, delayed speech and experienced strong separation anxiety, this made me worry just a little bit more. I first met with Teresa, the Service Manager at Figtree in late 2020 and we decided to start the enrolment in February 2021.

Prior to the twins commencing, we attended a number of orientation sessions. While in the past Dimitri had been very nervous about being just a few metres away from me, I was delighted to see that when we walked into the outdoor play space of Figtree, Dimitri was enthralled by the Figtree Jungle. He was so excited to be exploring the water features, sand pit and animals that he soon forgot that I was even there. My son was playing independently and was focused on discovering what wonders were to be found in the Figtree outdoor play space. These orientation sessions helped fill me with great comfort and joy and I was now sure that I had found the right place for my children.

Ten weeks later and we have all been able to see the change in Dimitri and it has been amazing. He confidently walks into Figtree each morning and is so warmly welcomed by the staff that I feel Figtree has become an extension of our home. When I say goodbye to my son, I hear ... 'goodbye mummy', words I had never heard before. The team of therapists who work with Dimitri have also noticed a huge difference over the last months and we are now all confidently looking forward to a bright future for our family. We are so happy to be part of Figtree Early Learning Centre and the St Anthony's Family Care community and look forward to what new and wonderful things await.

– Elpida

St Anthony's commitment to supporting children with disabilities to participate at Figtree is only possible due to the support of our donors and benefactors. The cost of the additional staff required to meet the individual needs of children is met through your generous contributions and we thank you for your ongoing support.

Teresa Petrone
Manager, Early Learning Service



