



St Anthony's Family Care

HEARTmatters

Christmas 2023

An Update From Our CEO

Dear Friends,

As the festive season approaches and another year draws to a close, I reflect upon the year gone by, a year that, while seemingly unremarkable, was marked by significant endeavours and busyness.

In March of 2022, the Early Learning Centre faced substantial storm damage, prompting continuous efforts throughout this year to restore the structural integrity of the buildings. Extensive works were undertaken by St Anthony's Family Care (SAFC) to weatherproof the roof externally, funded by our organisation. Thankfully, insurance coverage facilitated all internal repairs. These challenges, however, impeded operational licensing capacity, resulting in a reduced number of children permitted to attending the centre.

As I draft this newsletter entry, I am pleased to advise that all restoration works are scheduled for completion by the end of November. We eagerly anticipate the completion of, perfectly timed for the Christmas season and the welcoming of new children in the beginning of 2024.

Throughout the year, both the Early Learning Centre and Disability Services relentlessly pursued recruitment efforts amidst a significant staffing shortage prevalent in the care sector. To address daily staffing needs, the engagement of agency staff became necessary. However, this interim solution lacks the personal connection and understanding of the individual needs of the children and young individuals we support.

Consequently, SAFC has revised its employment practices, striving to be more appealing to job

seekers while also focusing on staff retention. We ardently hope that these measures yield the appointment of high-calibre employees in the near future.

Witnessing growth across service delivery areas prompted a comprehensive review of the organisational structure. Previously, functions such as human resources, property management, and communications were predominantly overseen by myself and service managers. It was identified that we need specific skills and expertise in particular areas to navigate evolving legislation. Consequently, we created new roles and recently appointed a Manager, Corporate Services, and a Manager of People & Culture. These pivotal roles bring the requisite skills to the organisation and will minimise risks and ensure compliance while consistently upholding SAFC's standards.

A standout moment of 2023 was the revival of our tradition: hosting a Caring Hearts event for our esteemed donors and sponsors, post the Covid Pandemic. Set against the backdrop of our new village, we hosted a High Tea and offered an opportunity for guests unfamiliar with the site to tour our facilities. Stories, memories, and laughter filled the event, much as in years past, and we eagerly anticipate future gatherings.



For those of you on Facebook or Instagram, we often post our latest news to our pages, so please like and follow us.

On the 13th of November 2023, SAFC conducted its Annual General Meeting with the Sisters of St Joseph, Congregational Leadership Team. During this meeting, the Annual Report (accessible on the SAFC website), was approved by the Company Members. Additionally, a new Chair was appointed to the Board following the resignation of Sabina Donnelly, who served generously and valuably for two full terms. Sabina's contributions, particularly in stewarding our investments for the site's redevelopment, have been immeasurable.

Fran Buckle, who joined the Board in 2021, has assumed the role of Chairperson. We eagerly look forward to collaborating with her. Among the key priorities for Fran and the Board in 2024 will be the development of a new strategic plan as the current plan reaches its successful completion.

Confidently, I anticipate that the forthcoming year will bring both opportunities and challenges to all within SAFC.

We've had an immensely fulfilling year, witnessing remarkable outcomes for the children and young individuals benefiting from SAFC's services. These achievements owe their existence to the unwavering support of our patrons, and for this, we remain deeply grateful.

May this Christmas season bring blessings to you and your loved ones, and may the New Year be filled with happiness, safety, and good health.

Warm regards,



Joanna Najdzion
Chief Executive Officer



The story of Alex and Declan over the next page, is one of unwavering love, resilience, and the transformative power of a caring community. In the face of immense challenges and adversity, they refused to give up, and St Anthony's Family Care stood by their side, offering support, guidance, and a sense of belonging.

Declan's progress from a nonverbal, non-communicative child to a young teenager with a sense of humour and the ability to engage with others is a testament to the dedication and love that surrounded him. Their story is an inspiration for others facing similar challenges, reminding them of the importance of never giving up and seeking the right resources and support.

As they continue on their journey, Alex and Declan know that St Anthony's will always be there for them, providing the care and support they need to live a fulfilling life. This heartwarming story showcases the incredible work of St Anthony's Family Care and the difference they make in the lives of families like Alex and Declan.



An Extension of Declan's Family



Thirteen years ago, I was cast on a journey I never anticipated.

My world changed dramatically when my sweet son, Declan, was diagnosed with autism at just 20 months old.

The diagnosis came like a bolt from the blue, leaving my husband and I feeling surreal and numb. We knew

little about what it truly meant but were determined to help our precious child.

I started Declan in various therapies, hoping for quick results, but the reality was different. Declan was nonverbal, non-communicative, and mostly unresponsive; it was as if he lived in his own isolated world.

Desperate to find help, I discovered a play therapy centre. Unfortunately, they hesitated to accept Declan because he wouldn't even sit down, not even to eat. His diet became increasingly restrictive, and he was hyperactive, not sleeping, and utterly out of control. Adding to the turmoil, Declan's father spent less and less time at home, and I was left feeling lost and alone.

In search for guidance and support, I heard of St Anthony's Family Care through word of mouth. It seemed like a long shot, given the previous rejections, but to my immense relief, Declan was welcomed with open arms and understanding hearts. For the first time since his birth, I felt that I was doing something right as a mother.

Declan began attending the inclusive daycare at St Anthony's, and for the first time in years, I felt empowered to help her son. The dedicated staff at the centre offered constructive plans and ways to assist Declan, and I finally had a sense of purpose.

As time passed, Declan's challenges became more apparent, and he was assessed as having a severe intellectual deficit at the age of three. The professionals told me that my son would need lifelong care and might never speak, toilet train, or engage with others. They advised me to give up and move on. It was a crushing blow.

Declan's father, unable to cope with the grim news, left us, sinking into a severe depression himself. This period was devastating for both Declan and I, as we grieved the absence of a loving father and partner. In the midst of this turmoil, St Anthony's was unwavering in their support. Instead of accepting defeat, they championed Declan's cause alongside me, giving us a sense of purpose and belonging.

St Anthony's persisted with toilet training, expanded Declan's dietary range, engaged him in various activities, and addressed his growing list of sensory needs. Slowly but surely, Declan began to make progress. He started participating in weekend activities with Disability Services at St Anthony's, which boosted his confidence and sense of self-worth.

He built relationships with trained staff who understood his needs better than anyone else could, and he experienced activities that were previously out of reach. Declan's world expanded, and with it, his ability to communicate.

St Anthony's continued to support me every step of the way as Declan transitioned to school. They helped me to apply to special schools that were appropriate for his abilities, ensuring that he had access to support plans and the same approaches that had already made a difference in his life.

At the age of 13, Declan continues to access St Anthony's Disability Services on a regular basis. While he remains nonverbal, he has found alternative ways to communicate. His infectious laughter and unique sense of humour have become his voice, and he uses visual cards, pointing, and gestures to convey his needs and feelings. He even makes eye contact and shares hugs with those around him. He participates in activities like cooking, craft, painting, ball games, and his absolute favourite – playing frisbee.

I have so much to thank St Anthony's for; they have become an integral part of Declan's life.

I look forward to the future when he will have the opportunity to access St Anthony's services for young adults, the Forge Program, after completing his schooling.

Alex – Declan's Mum



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Peace at Christmas

Thank You for your support
in helping children with
disabilities to reach their
greatest potential...

...Wishing you all the blessings
of a wonderful and safe
Christmas Season.



SAFC is happy to announce that our
2023 Annual Report is out now.

Grab a cuppa and read through what
we've been up to for 2023!

Head to:

<https://www.safc.org.au/annual-reports>

For more information and to provide your feedback:

Ph: (02) 9747 5782 Email: enquiries@safc.org.au Web: www.safc.org.au

...Wishing you
all the blessings
of a wonderful
Christmas
Season

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your support
in helping children
with disabilities
to reach their
greatest
potential...**

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St Anthony's Family Care

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