



St Anthony's Family Care

HEART matters

Easter 2023

An Update From Our CEO

Dear Friends,



It is so hard to believe that Easter is already upon us.

It was not so long ago that St Anthony's Family Village was abuzz with excitement, children's laughter and singing of Christmas songs, the ringing of bells as Santa made multiple visits and spread much joy

and happiness as he visited all

the programs and distributed presents. This was particularly important for the children and families who are unable to visit a local shopping centre at the end of the year to see Santa. The excessive noise and crowds are too overwhelming for many children with disabilities.

A special visit from Santa in an environment where the children are at ease and have a sense of routine and familiarity, made for experiences which were much more personal and enjoyable. For many children this was the first Santa photo families had been able to take for many years and as such, filled mums and dads with much joy.

With everyone taking a few days off to enjoy family time, the programs recommenced in early January and this year, we were blessed with a glorious Sydney summer.

Long days filled with sunshine and warm temperatures ensured the Disability Services program could offer children some exciting activities during the school holiday break.

The three-week vacation care program was filled with a broad range of both, centre based and community access options. These ranged from a New Year party and gingerbread baking to lots of water fun at Sydney beaches, rivers and pools, picnics in the park and celebrations for Chinese New Year and making and eating dumplings!

With the start of the New Year, we also resumed services for both the Forge Young Adults Day program and Figtree Early Learning Centre.

Both programs were thrilled to welcome back existing families and new families who were joining the St Anthony's Family.

The children and young people who access St Anthony's Services come from diverse backgrounds and we always strive to ensure each individual is made to feel included, valued and

their interests and hobbies recognised and extended.

We do this by celebrating many different occasions and designing and implementing learning experiences which stem from any interests which are displayed.



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

Some of the special events we have celebrated in the first few months of the year have included Lunar New Year, St Patrick's Day, Harmony Day and of course, Australia Day.

In addition to these, we have taken cues from our young learners and have established five large Vegepods throughout the village in which the children will grow and harvest a large selection of herbs and vegetables.

Other learning experiences this year have included science projects, various cooking programs, learning music and languages and participating in yoga classes.

It is only with the dedication and commitment of St Anthony's donors and supporters, who give so generously, that we can continue the work of St Mary MacKillop.

Over the past few months the team in the office have been working to develop a new website for St Anthony's Family Care which also clearly explains the services which we offer across the village. The new site was launched in early February and allows the user to navigate to subsites for Figtree, EPIK and Forge from the main site. In addition to this, we also had a short animation made which sits on the main site.

At present, we are building additional animation clips which will explain the services we offer in greater detail. Once these are finished, these too will be hosted on our website. Animation clips which are short and consist of easy to follow graphics are a great tool for people with disabilities to use to better understand upcoming transitions.



This is particularly important for people with autism who find changes to a routine challenging. Parents will be able to use the animations to show their children, on an iPad or similar device, where they are going and for what purpose which will reduce anxiety and challenging behaviours.

We are thrilled with our new website and are looking forward to uploading the remaining animations and knowing that these will make a significant difference in the lives of the people we support.

The operation of our services and making organisational improvements, such as with the new website, is only possible through the continued support of our donors.

Wishing you peace, love and happiness at Easter and always,

Joanna Najdzion

Chief
Executive
Officer



A Village Full of Heart

Our story at St Anthony's Family Care (SAFC) first began in May 2020 when our first child, Isabella, was 18 months old and started attending Figtree Early Learning Centre. It was at the height of the COVID pandemic and while this was an overwhelming time within the world, the SAFC village and team at Figtree helped create a sense of safety and security within the community we were joining.

Shortly after joining St Anthony's, in June of 2020, we found out that our second child would be born not only with Down Syndrome, but also with a significant congenital heart defect. When we arrived at the ultrasound appointment the technicians were very quiet as they looked at the scan. My husband and I knew they were going to say that the scan had shown that something was not as it should be, and we prepared ourselves. A Genetic Counsellor took us to a private room and explained that the scan, not only showed a high nuchal fold (thickness at the back of the baby's neck), a small baby for his age and other markers for Down Syndrome, but our baby also had at least two holes in his heart.

We were advised that since we were seeing this at such an early stage of pregnancy (11 weeks), the baby was likely to have other health problems too. We were presented with a long list of statistical medical conditions that are more common in people with Down Syndrome and were told that our baby had a 1 in 3 chance of miscarriage or stillbirth. If by some miracle, our baby did survive the birth, there was a good chance he wouldn't live very long and would likely need immediate surgery to try and repair the damage to his heart.

To say that we were filled with grief and sadness is an understatement, but we decided to proceed with the pregnancy wondering what this would mean for our family.

When our son was finally born in December 2020, we named him Theodore which means "Gift from God". Teddy, as we affectionately call him, was truly our little miracle but the

challenges of having a son with Down Syndrome were only starting.

At a scan when Teddy was two months old, we found out things were much worse with his heart than first thought. It was at this time that the support and well wishes from the SAFC community really helped our family. The Figtree staff were quick to offer additional days of care for Isabella, so she could continue to thrive and develop alongside her friends with a sense of security and routine, while we took the extra time needed to care for Teddy.

SAFC was also kind enough to cover the fees during this time, through their Mary MacKillop Canonisation Fund, which significantly helped our family financially at this time.

Following successful heart surgery in April 2021 we were able to start making longer term plans for Teddy. The one decision we never had to struggle with as a family was where Teddy would go for childcare. From the minute we knew our son had Down Syndrome, we began speaking to the team at Figtree and were always reassured that Teddy would not only be welcomed with open arms, but also fully included in the programs offered at the centre.



A Village Full of Heart, continued...

Something I have since discovered isn't necessarily true for many other families who continue to face barriers in accessing inclusive early childhood education for their child with a disability.

Since starting at Figtree in January 2023, the staff at Figtree Early Learning Centre have been magnificent. To assist Teddy with communication, the staff are now learning Auslan (sign language) so Teddy can make his wants and needs understood. The team have also taken the time to meet on many occasions to help ensure the learning environment offers Teddy everything he needs to flourish.

Teddy loves spending time with his peers and

excitedly falls out of my arms and into the welcoming hugs of the Educators each day he attends.

As we plan for Teddy's future, we look forward to a partnership with the SAFC community as we help our son learn to take his first steps, communicate effectively, feed himself and continue developing relationships with his peers and carers.

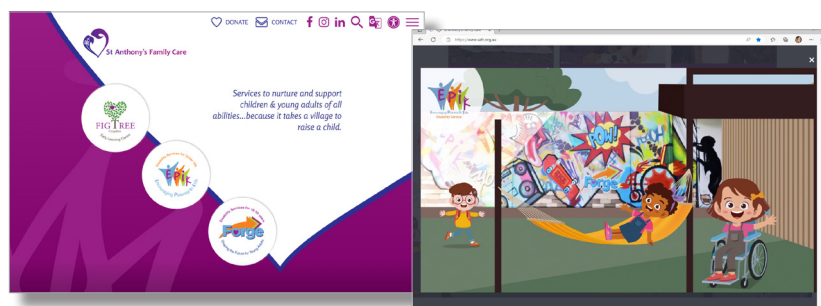
We sincerely thank the SAFC and Figtree community for their ongoing support and look forward to a bright and happy future for both our children and whole heartily agree with the SAFC tagline 'it takes a village to raise a child'.

– Louise Burke
(Teddy and Isabella's Mum)



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

**...Wishing you all the
blessings of a peaceful
and safe Easter Season.**



**SAFC is pleased to announce we
have a brand new website!**
www.safc.org.au

**Take a look, you can even make
your donations via the website.**

Follow Us on Social Media!



/StAnthonysfamilycare



/stanthonysfamilycare/



/FigtreeEarlyLearningCentre



/figtree_croydon/



/EPIKdisabilityservices



/epik_disability_service/



/Forgedisabilityservices



/forge_disability_services/

For more information and to provide your feedback:

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