

St Margaret's students lend hand knitting scarves for seafarers

It might be a long way from the high seas but at St Margaret's you will find students knitting and nattering as they knit scarves for the Mission to Seafarers (MTS) Brisbane.

The Year 6 students were inspired by a talk given by MTS Chaplain Stephen Briggs who told of the hardships of life as a seafarer.

Stephen revealed seafarers spend long periods at sea, away from their families, and may suffer loneliness, ill-health or injury. The Mission to Seafarers aims to assist seafarers in all kinds of practical ways and part of this includes a care package upon arrival to port, which includes a hand-knitted scarf.

St Margaret's primary teacher Mary Surtees said the cause struck a chord in the hearts and minds of students.

"Stephen's discussion made it very real for the girls and gave them a sense of empowerment and ownership.

"They could envision how their contribution would positively impact someone else's life.

"Community engagement is embedded as part of the school's ethos and learning and we really encourage the girls to give back through activities that have a positive impact on the communities in which they live and will, one day, work," said Ms Surtees.

With knitting somewhat a dying art, the seventy students were encouraged to each find a mentor who could teach and guide them through the process of hand-knitting a scarf.

For many, this meant connecting across the generations.

Miss Surtees said this project was one of the ways the school could connect with the Archbishop Dr Phillip Aspinall's 2017 message to schools encouraging students to bring generations together.

The Archbishop invited students to see what they could learn from people of all different ages – really young and really old and all the people in between.

"I have had many parents and grandparents comment on how much they have enjoyed the connectedness and deepening relationship with their daughters and granddaughters whilst sharing the art of knitting," said Ms Surtees.

A weekly lunchtime knitting club was also established to assist students in grappling the finer points of knitting.

"The knitting klatch would chat and gossip.

"Other lunchtimes, you would find students in the library, just quietly knitting away.

"Some of the girls enjoyed the peace and quiet or even the solitude of knitting, an interesting reflection given the fruits of labour were going to those who'd spent many months in relative isolation at sea.

"One girl said she knitted while she watched television until she realised she'd started with 40 stitches and ended up with 100.

"She then decided she'd better not watch television and knit at the same time!" said Ms Surtees.

Year 6 student Mia Easton was extremely motivated to make a difference, gathering a groundswell of support from community groups including the Northside Brisbane Knitters and Pomona Knitting Group.

Mia has gathered 107 beanies and an additional 47 scarves through her community engagement.

Collectively, the Year 6 cohort is aiming to donate more than 100 scarves along with the beanies to the MTS.