

Media Release

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Generations unite to share knowledge in pilot program

Students and seniors have come together to pioneer the trial of a new free program aimed at bridging the gap between generations and imparting knowledge about technology.

CatholicCare Wollongong teamed up with students from Corpus Christi High School, Oak Flats and Fr Joe Nguyen of All Saints Parish Shellharbour to trial this new intergenerational program called CROSS+GEN.

The year 10 students volunteered their time to patiently guide seniors as they explored the use of their phones, iPad's and laptops. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital technology in staying connected and the seniors enjoyed learning how to connect to Wi-Fi, take and share photos with family, use social media, download apps, scan QR codes, use Skype and much more.

Senior participant Michelle said the support from students created a non-threatening environment for the older people to learn the technology. "We've connected over a few topics," she said. "The students are very patient with us. They're not doing it for us, they are demonstrating, observing, and helping to empower us with the skills."

Seniors guided the session, explaining what they wanted to do with the device, so students could adapt the training to meet their needs. Another senior participant, Andrew—himself a former teacher and school counsellor—said the main benefit was meeting and spending time with students like Poppy.

"It's been a blessing to be part of this," he said. "My wife was very sick during the COVID lockdown and we haven't been able to get out and socialise. I appreciate Poppy's time talking to me and using her great skills to help me."

Poppy said it was nice to help other people with the skills she has grown up with. "We're born with technology at our fingertips," she said, "My grandma was very sick during COVID restrictions and I didn't get to see my grandparents. I miss them a lot, so this has been a way to connect with the older generation."

CatholicCare Director, Michael Austin, said both CatholicCare and Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong are thrilled the pilot program has successfully connected student volunteers with local seniors. "We look forward to expanding this program to other regions for the benefit of seniors and youth, regardless of cultural or religious background," he said.

The successful launch of the program will pave the way to rollout more training sessions in the Maccarthur, Shoalhaven, Southern Highlands and Illawarra regions.

For more information go to www.catholiccare.dow.org.au.

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