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Senior first place
Elizabeth Allen

Pat's bus

Pat Hill doesn't have a title or job description like most people.

But the work she does is more valuable than words can describe. Pat is the driving force behind Sunbury's Street Surfer bus, or as it is affectionately known, Pat's Bus, a bus that has been described as a youth club on wheels.

Every weekend, Pat and her volunteers can be found in the Street Surfer bus, cruising the streets of Sunbury and surrounding areas, at youth events, skate parks—wherever young people are. It provides the youth of the area a chance to have fun in a relaxed, safe environment, as well as giving them an opportunity to talk, and receive information about any problems they may have.

But Pat Hill's work extends further than just her bus. She is, in effect, a social worker without formal qualifications, who spends most of her time helping young people and their parents through difficult times. She educates people about the risks of drug use, runs a parent support program and finds accommodation, work and support for those she helps. She works closely with young people and is confronted by issues of drug use, mental illness and homelessness through this work.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there are over 20,000 homeless people in Victoria alone, as recorded from the 2001 census. As well as this, the Kids Helpline receives over 3,000 calls per year from young people concerning drug and alcohol use. This accounts for over three per cent of calls made to the service each year. These statistics indicate that people like Pat are desperately needed.

So what drives 60-year-old Pat to spend her days helping out the people

that most give would give up on?

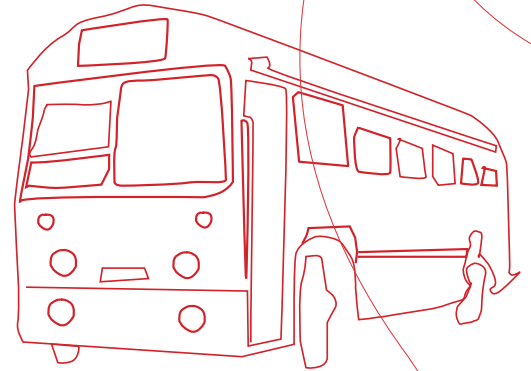
'It's a love, and a sadness at seeing so many lives wrecked. I know what mums and dads go through, every siren you hear you think, is that them? I know it's someone, and I think, 'they need more help than that'. Pat was inspired by 'seeing the devastation out there, through the kids and the parents not having enough help. I looked at my son and I thought, what would have helped him?'

Pat can identify with some of those that she helps. Her own son became a drug addict and was jailed for robbery. The lack of services available to assist Pat help her son angered her so much, she began campaigning for better youth and support services in the area.

'Until you experience it you have no idea what it's like to live with a person who's under the complete influence of drugs, and the services just aren't there to help.'

After seeing a program featuring a Street Surfer Bus based in Sunshine, Pat decided this was what Sunbury needed. She spent a year on the Sunshine Street Surfer Bus, and eventually her dream became a reality when bus company West Trans donated a bus to Pat's cause. And the donations kept coming—among them a \$15,000 grant from the State Government, and donations from Hume Council and Sunbury Downs Secondary College. Sunbury Paint Right donated the paint for the Bus' stunning artwork that has made it a bright landmark for Sunbury residents.

The large yellow bus carries a Playstation, VCR, TV and a bar-beque, but also carries information about youth issues for young



people as well as parents. The bus is currently run by Pat and a host of volunteers including the Sunbury police force who help run the overall program. They rely on volunteers, donations, funding from grants and money from activities held by the Street Surfer Bus team.

The hardest thing about her work, Pat states, is 'wishing I could do more; sometimes I come across things and think I'm only doing them half way. But I think what I can feel proud of is that people know that I'm there to help.'

Pat's long term goals never stop. She dreams of a farm where young people addicted to drugs can work off their habit, of a program where kids can gain real life skills, of better health services for mental illness, and better education for schools and parents about drugs. Pat's 'To Do' list is endless and she wonders how she will ever stop. 'I keep trying to cut down on all the things I'm doing, but I don't know how I'll ever retire', she laughs.

Elizabeth Allen, Sunbury Downs Secondary College, Sunbury, VIC.

Us and them

Senior
second place
Marina Bojchinov

Aba is your average 12-year-old boy.

He likes sports, is interested in music and collects the popular Yu-Gi-Oh cards like all the other boys his age.

But all the other kids take sideways glances at him. Not because of his cool new shoes or brand new Gameboy, but because he is different; he is a Muslim. Because he has a different way of life he is teased. 'Freak', 'stupid Muslim' and 'go back to your own country' are some of the taunts he is subjected to daily by his less understanding peers. As a result of this constant bullying, Aba has low self esteem, no confidence and no love for life.

These days, more than ever before, we are seeing a shocking trend emerge among school children: the bullying epidemic. More than 2/3 of all school children around Australia are the victims of vicious bullying that happens right under most of our noses. Research indicates that approximately one in six students report being bullied on a weekly basis. Bullying is believed to be one of the main causes of depression and suicide among teens and young adults—among them an appallingly high rate of Muslim children.

Salaam Abadalia and her mother fled Jordan to escape a life of hardship and oppression. They

came in the hope of a new life in Australia. 'We said goodbye to everyone back home [in Jordan]. I can't remember it very well, I was 11 years of age, but I do remember my mother's words. She said to me that we will have lots of friends and make a life in Australia'. They arrived in Australia in 1999, and Salaam recalls that her life changed dramatically.

She and her mother stayed with a family friend who had fled Jordan years before. 'I remember when I first went to school. I was in a traditional hijab, and all the other kids kept looking at me as if I was some kind of animal that should be caged up. It was a scary experience, but I did manage to make some friends.'

As soon as September 11 is mentioned her face takes a stony appearance. 'I remember that day very well', she says with a bitter laugh. 'After that my friends didn't call anymore and no one would really come near me.'

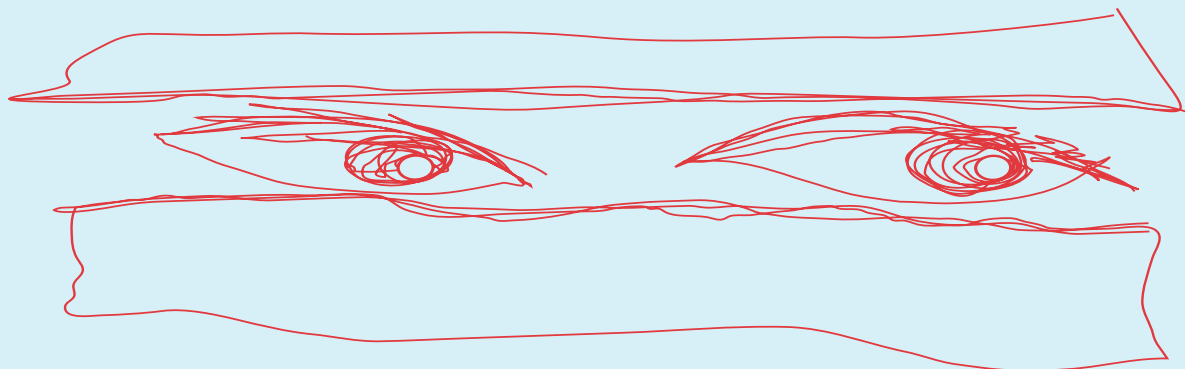
She says it was one of the hardest things, being 13, and just wanting to be like the other kids. 'At one stage I refused to wear the hijab anymore, I was ashamed of my heritage ... of my culture. I am now learning to overcome that. I don't care what any one thinks of me. I am no terrorist. Don't judge us for others'

mistakes.' Some say September 11 was the downfall of the Muslim religion in the western world; any tolerance that once stood was automatically demolished—and prejudice took its place. This was increasingly—and alarmingly—evident in the way people treated students of the Muslim faith. They were identified by the wider community as a threat to society and became an easy target for bullying in schools and in their own neighbourhoods and homes.

When asked what she wants to do later in life, Salaam replies, 'all I want is to educate people about Muslims, to show them we are a good people, and to find tolerance and understanding. No one should go through what I and other Muslim children go through every day. I'll show them that we can run as fast or jump as high as they can, or do anything they can do, and stand up and be heard.'

As we have heard so many times, education starts at home. It's up to all of us to teach our kids respect, tolerance and values, as our own get passed down to them and will be for generations to come.

Marina Bojchinov, St Francis Xavier College, Latham, ACT.



Readers challenge illiteracy

The Quidditch World Cup ... Sam-I-am ... The One Ring ...

Junior 1st place
Katherine Wyld



If you understood these phrases, you too must have revelled in the delights and wonders of books such as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Green Eggs and Ham* and *The Lord of the Rings*. You would have cried with your favourite characters, soared through the air on a broomstick, been transported to distant lands and laughed at many witty characters. You would have done all this, but you probably would never have thought about what it would be like if you could not read or write.

Imagine now that you are illiterate. You walk into a classroom, sit at your desk and stare in bewilderment at the many posters and charts adorning the walls. At the words written on the whiteboard. At your many books.

Would you feel scared? Afraid? Embarrassed? For many children here in Australia this situation is reality.

A big issue facing indigenous communities today is illiteracy.

Up to 93 per cent of indigenous children are illiterate. Many were not introduced to picture books at an early age, do not see adults reading the newspaper each morning and have no access to community libraries to borrow books.

This should be an issue of concern for all Australians, indigenous and non-indigenous. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to an education. Isn't literacy a big part of education? It has also been found that improvements in literacy bring a dramatic change to health, employment and well-being.

Many young people think they can't make a difference. The fact is that young people who can read and have access to books can do a lot to help.

One way is to join the Riverbend Readers' Challenge. Find ways of letting other children know about this project and why it evolved.

Look for simple but creative ways of encouraging lots of children to take

on the challenge.

The Riverbend Readers' Challenge is a joint initiative of Riverbend Books, The Fred Hollows Foundation *Literacy for Life* program, and Ian Thorpe's *Fountain for Youth* Trust. The aims of the Challenge are to raise money to buy books; to encourage a love of reading in indigenous communities; and give young readers an opportunity to contribute to others' lives.

The entrance fee is used to buy books for targeted indigenous communities. All participants receive a certificate signed by Ian Thorpe.

This is not the only way to make a difference. Play an active role—join a group that contributes to the lives of others or raise money for a good cause. Donate some of your old books to those Aboriginal communities with none. Every person has the chance to make a difference.

Katherine Wyld, Loreto College, Coorparoo, QLD.

Exposing teen torture

Junior second
place
Kaitlyn Carlia

It's not just the paranoia churning around your insides—no, it's the icy glare from the group of seemingly perfect people parading past your solitary existence, it's the indecipherable whisper, it's the chilling prickle of heat burning your face, and it's the malicious laughter—directed at you. Female bullying is much more subtle than a physical or verbal confrontation, and it's easily overlooked by blind eyes. This form of bullying is common among teenage girls aged between 12 and 16. It can be just as harmful as more blatant forms of bullying, so it's time for it to be revealed and resolved.

'Bullies think they're cool, and in their minds, cool equals power', says one victim.

When asked why bullies force their aggression onto others, a former bully answered, 'For me it was a protection thing. If people know you're tough, they'll leave you alone, and you won't get hurt.'

Acceptance is a significant reason. A witness to bullying said, 'I've seen them sit there and laugh just because their friends are laughing; they're afraid of what their friends think of them if they don't.'

The victims of bullying are usually quiet people who are easy targets. Research shows victims can be people who differ in appearance, of a different race or financial status, who pose threats or who achieve academically. Very commonly, victims are people who resist the pressure to conform. 'I didn't care what they thought, so they decided to make me care.'

Female bullying is often inconspicuous—betrayal, glaring coldly and saying nasty things about a victim in their absence. Another unique

method is giving 'fake compliments'. 'They'd compliment me, and when I'd thank them they'd laugh and be like, "just kidding, you're a loser"', a bullying victim explains.

It could be a case of 'safety in numbers', where a bully uses body language to block the victim out of the group, or where a whole group whispers indistinguishably and laughs at the victim.

This type of bullying is more prevalent, and in many cases more harmful than physical bullying. Responses from a survey outline some consequences: the inability to trust people, loss of self-confidence, feelings of worthlessness, self-harming and depression. A victim remarks, 'I couldn't say anything to them, because they'd just get worse, so I had to sit there and take it. I ended up hating myself and my life.'

Invisible bullying is more severe than people perceive it to be, so how can it stop? Anyone who's a victim or has observed a similar situation to those listed above should first identify who the bullies are and what they're doing, approach an authoritative figure like a teacher, counsellor or principal, and tell them the problem. DON'T hesitate, the problem is best out in the open.

This teen dilemma is everywhere and it needs to be resolved, so everyone should take the initiative and stop the pain before it's too late!
Kaitlyn Carlia, Magdalene Catholic High School, Harrington Park, NSW.