Close the Gap

Oxfam has been running a campaign to raise awareness of the need to ‘Close the Gap’ between Indigenous communities’ access to health care in comparison with their non-indigenous counterparts. This gap is reflected in the reduced life expectancy of indigenous people when compared with non-indigenous peoples. This year, after a call for interested Year 9 students, a committee was formed to run Pembroke School’s very first ‘Close the Gap’ event, held on 22 March. The 10 students on the committee—Michaela, Ellen, Matt, Sam, Alex, Natasha, Ty, Tess, Sam and Kate—met every week. They devised a range of activities and allocated tasks to each other in order for the event to be a real success. They worked extremely effectively as a team and were always supportive of each other.

It was decided to have a couple of appearances in School assembly to raise awareness of the event, along with designing and making posters in order to advertise around the School. Student photos from the Marree exchanges were used to illustrate the posters. In addition, plans were drawn up to create a huge banner on which interested students could come along on the day and place a painted hand print. The colours of the Oxfam campaign were to be used: green, black and white. With help from the Art Department, a large piece of canvas was purchased, 5 metres long and 1.5 metres wide. The words CLOSE THE GAP were outlined ready for the painting. Over the course of 6 weeks, the committee members made all the plans for the event and ensured that all the necessary equipment and permissions were confirmed.

It was overcast but clear on the day and the banner area was set up outside the chapel. A presentation was made to the Middle School in the weekly assembly. Students were also encouraged to sign a petition to be sent back to Oxfam and then forwarded to the Federal Government (over 175,000 people have already signed nationally). Even before the bell rang for lunchtime, there were many students queuing up to take part in signing the petition and adding their hand print to the banner. It was extremely busy all through lunchtime and the committee members managed the entire event. At the end of the event, the banner was completely covered in hand prints and clearly spelled out the campaign slogan. Students are now able to understand more clearly the issue of the gap in healthcare access between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

It is hoped to continue the event in 2013, with the current committee acting as mentors for a new group of Year 9 students who are interested in becoming involved.

My thanks go to Miss O’Connor and Ms Cowell for giving up their time to assist the group, and to Michael, a Year 12 student, who very kindly videoed on the day. My congratulations go to the ‘Close the Gap’ committee for running such a successful event, and we look forward to enjoying the second ‘Close the Gap’ event for Pembroke School in 2013.

Mrs Piggott
Head of Humanities

Emily, Ash, Molly, Geordie, Gigi, Maris, Isabelle, Jack (all Yr 9)
The Petition
Sam (Yr 9) and Ella (Yr 10) add their hand print to the banner