



Media Release: Auburn teachers go to bat for the kids.

Auburn Public School today announced that it would be taking part in a national pilot creating inclusive playspaces for children in school environment, after reaching their fundraising goal of \$100,000 last week when they received the Clubs NSW grant from Dooleys for \$50,000.

Kathleen Hansell, the deputy principal, had a vision to create a sensory playground where the children .

“Our 620 students come from a diverse range of backgrounds with 98% coming from non-English speaking and low socio-economic families and include children with Autism and other special needs.”

“We are a designated school in Auburn for children with intellectual disabilities and have a number of support classes for students with special needs, Autism and other sensory disorders. Our dream is to build an inclusive playspace that will help our students develop social skills. “

As children, nearly everything they learn is based on sensory experiences – touching, hearing, seeing, tasting and moving. A number of children in our community have difficulty processing and integrating the sensory stimuli and therefore also have difficulty socialising and making friendships in the playground. The construction of a sensory recreational area will improve access for our students with Autism and intellectual disabilities, to positive playground opportunities with mainstream students.

Kathleen reached out to national charity, Touched by Olivia, for assistance in design and raising funds. Touched by Olivia partners with communities and corporations to create inclusive playspaces in public areas, and was in the process of developing a toolkit to be used in school playgrounds.

“When Kathleen and Naomi approached us, we were impressed by the passion they had to make an inclusive playspace for their students. Often you will find that play is overlooked in the school environment – playgrounds compete with building and education for funding and resource.. It’s a pro active principal backed by the fundraising of the P & C that makes a playspace happen.”

“Auburn Public School is very unique because the teachers, led by Kathleen and Naomi, have raised the money to make this happen. They have worked in a low socio –economic status community to raise over \$100,000 to build an exceptional space that will include all the kids, regardless of their age or ability, and this amazing effort should be applauded,” said the Executive Officer of Touched by Olivia, Rebecca Ho.

The inclusive sensory recreational area will have features specifically designed to stimulate autistic and special needs students, but will also be available for use by the whole school community.

Naomi Bonus is the support unit teacher and works closely with many of the students that are overwhelmed in the playground.

“Children who have been diagnosed with disabilities have support in the class room that help them to learn, but when they get out onto the playground, a lot of the kids are lost. Gross motor activities can be challenging, and other children don’t understand why they can’t do thing. Our students, especially those with autism spectrum disorders, don’t understand the social rules that develop in childhood and are missing out on the many benefits of play.”

“The inclusive playspace will address these issues and provide all the children an opportunity to play in a fun, interactive social space.”

Kathleen and Naomi have run a successful fundraising campaign over the past 18 months in addition to their large work loads.





"We have been highly proactive in raising funds in a low socio-economic status community. We have ran chocolate drive, sausage sizzles, fundraising raffles and sent out letters for support to companies and businesses and applied for lots of grants."

Last week, ClubNSW awarded a grant of over \$50,000 to the project. Dooleys Community Relationship Manager Julie Milson said "Dooleys supports Auburn Public School. We believe in the importance of inclusion for everyone. We congratulate Auburn Public School on their vision in producing this amazing project".

Coupled with almost to years of fundraising activity, grants from the State Government Community Building Partnerships program and a \$20,000 grant from Transgrid, Kathleen and Naomi were delighted to have reached their goal.

"We can't wait to see the kids faces when we open the playspace. All the hard work will be worth it!"

Play is an integral part of children's growth and development and we should provide them with as many opportunities to access facilities that will help develop their physical, social and sensory skills.

The playspace is the first step and lots of programming is going to follow that helps teach children about inclusion through play. If you are interested and would like to donate time at a working bee, plants for the gardens and veggie beds or loose parts play materials like balls, soccer goals, please contact Rebecca Ho on 0414 506 606.

For all media enquiries please contact Rebecca Ho 0414 506 606 rebecca.ho@touchedbyolivia.com.au