

Making Merry Days in the Lockdown.



ERCS Tarneit Program Coordinator handing over a laptop donated by Loreto College to a parent at the Penrose Promenade Community Centre

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the strict COVID-19 restrictions seemed impossible to navigate when compared to the virtual connections we have now come to appreciate. Still, the on and off face-to-face transition came with unanticipated challenges. The current hybrid transition primarily involves virtual engagements alongside supervised face-to-face interactions, which has manifested mixed emotions within the community.

Maya, a quiet and intelligent little girl in Grade 4, and her sister in Grade 5 had both attended face-to-face homework club diligently in the past. However, as soon as the lockdown began, Maya missed homework club for three weeks as her family tried to gather some resources for the online transition. The two sisters were later able to attend online homework club with the help of their mother's mini-iPad. In contrast to Maya's quiet nature, she actively engages during the zoom break out room where two mentors and one other student interact for 50 minutes, and remains silent when in the main zoom room where over 25 students and 15 tutors interact for 15 minutes.

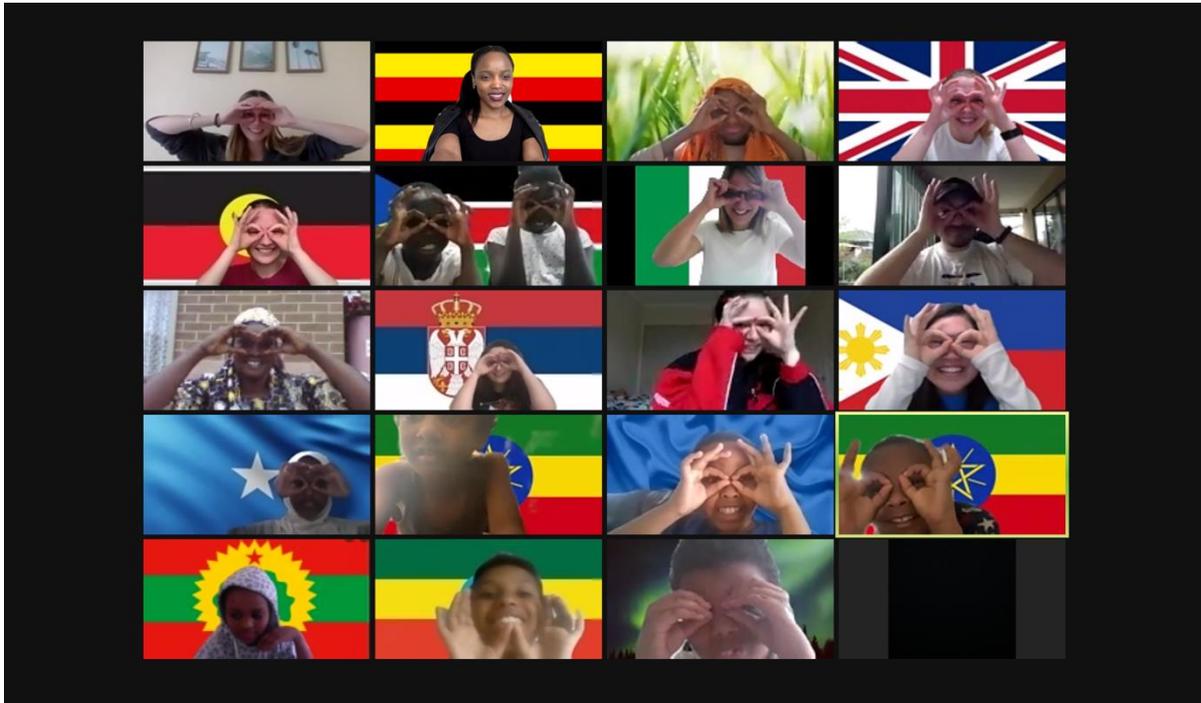


As the homework club transitioned from face-to-face to online extended, the mother of the two girls expressed that one mini-iPad was inadequate in supporting her two daughters' online homework club sessions. Fortunately, at the beginning of Term 3 2021, ERCS received a generous donation of 30 computers from Loreto College. Maya's mother was one of many parents who quickly expressed their interest for a free laptop loan to ease their children's online homework club and other e-learning tasks.

Thankfully, because of the collaboration between the different local community centres and ERCS, the different homework clubs contacted several parents to arrange a safe and nearby place to collect the donated laptops. For Maya's mother, this collection point was none other than a car boot in the car park area at Penrose Promenade Community centre. This exercise was overseen by the community centre support team, the ERCS community engagement lead, and the ERCS program coordinators. ERCS is grateful for the partnership we have built with Loreto College, and it looks like Maya's mother can now occasionally have the iPad to herself again.

Through ERCS online homework clubs, different community members have also been impacted. For instance, Racheal privately managed a vibrant children's play park eighteen months ago, a profession that aligned with her teaching skills and love to spend time with children. However, the constant on and off lockdown meant a complete shutdown of her privately owned business. Today, Racheal virtually supports the ERCS homework club at Tarneit. This opportunity has afforded Racheal the chance to work with a culturally diverse group of students and tutors' kids, which has helped the program run smoothly by applying the many skills Racheal mastered in her previous work.

The story of two ERCS homework club students and their mother and the story of Racheal shares a glimpse into the positive outcomes and challenges many families continue to navigate in these unprecedented times. As restrictions progressively ease, we see the virtual engagements we have come to share amongst ourselves as an opportunity to extend how we engage with our community – rather than a bad time that we wish to put behind us.



Raise the flags: A cultural day at homework club with our mentors and students having a flag representing their heritage as a screen background.



Happy feet and little twirls: A Ballet dance session at homework club with a representative from the Australian Ballet Association.



Donations: Pristine pre-owned laptops that were donated by Loreto College to families with children attending ERCS homework clubs.



Picnic ready: An invitation to ERCS families and volunteers to celebrate a year that has been filled with many milestones (2021).

**Thank you to all our partners and the entire ERCS community!
ERCS, spreading love everywhere...**

Written by: Rebecca Nalwanga