

Bialik College Students working with dogs in an Education First

BIALIK COLLEGE

W.C Fields famously said “Never work with animals or children”, but Bialik College has successfully been doing both! In an Australian education first, Bialik has introduced a ground-breaking “Dogs for Life” program, in conjunction with the Centre for Service and Therapy Dogs Australia (CSTDA).

Students in Prep-Year 3 participate in the weekly program geared towards building social and emotional intelligence, as well as enhancing curriculum activities. The program has given them the opportunity to achieve amazing educational goals and improve their emotional wellbeing.

Kevin Picker, general manager of the CSTDA, says the dogs are a great way to teach students key concepts by showing rather than just telling. Students in the Early Learning Centre have used the dogs as a conduit through which to discuss issues sometimes not easily discussed with others. Dogs have proven to be a great way to teach students key concepts such as verbal and non-verbal communication, rights and responsibilities and conflict resolution by actively seeing those concepts in action rather than simply talking about them. Children can then apply these concepts elsewhere such as when making new friends in the playground or respecting a stranger’s personal space. Furthermore, the dogs help



enhance social and emotional development with improvements in children’s self-esteem, autonomy, and empathy for others.

Mr Picker believes “dogs are the best partner for human wellness. They are also the easiest animals to work with in a therapy and educational setting. Dogs are non-judgemental – they help children reach a level of self-esteem that cannot necessarily be reached in interacting with their peers.”

Daphne Gaddie, Head of Bialik’s Early Learning Centre (ELC) explains, “What’s remarkable about this program is that it enables children to learn and understand concepts that are so important but are sometimes too complex, sensitive or uncomfortable for both teachers and students

to tackle. Children have heard social values expressed with words over and over again but do not always truly absorb the meaning unless it is through actions. Using dogs as the conduit for discussion allows for a much deeper and broader understanding.” Parents have also expressed an overwhelmingly positive response with some saying “there really is no better way to teach empathy than through the use of dogs”.

The “Dogs for Life” program has been running at Bialik College for just over six months and teachers are reporting fantastic results. Having been run successfully overseas, the program is headed by Yariv Ben-Yosef, who was previously a tiger trainer in Israel and has worked internationally to

develop unique and innovative techniques to improve the quality of life for people affected by physical, psychological or emotional disorders by training service and therapy dogs.

Head of Bialik College Primary School, Karen Friede, expressed her long-term vision. “We are working with the CSTDA to mould the program to our specific needs so that it will grow with us and continue providing our students with the myriad of benefits we have witnessed.”

Bialik College gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Wilson Family who have enabled the introduction of the “Dogs for Life” program into the school which has attracted educational interest nationally.