



**St Gabriel's School**  
EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION K-12

# Gabe's Gazette

SEMESTER 1 | JULY 2026



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## Editorial & Publication Lead:

Allison McNally

**Contributing Writer:** Ainslie McNally

**Graphic Design:** Kerri Valkova

**Print Production:** Arrow Print



**St Gabriel's School**  
EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION K-12

## Street Address:

190 Old Northern Road,  
Castle Hill NSW 2154

**Phone:** (02)9634 2367

**Email:** [info@stgabriels.nsw.edu.au](mailto:info@stgabriels.nsw.edu.au)



**Website**

[stgabriels.nsw.edu.au](http://stgabriels.nsw.edu.au)



**Facebook**

[facebook.com/stgabrielsschoolcastlehill/](https://facebook.com/stgabrielsschoolcastlehill/)



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**Nurturing Independence.  
Transforming Lives.**



EREA Visitors and St Gabriel's Executive Team



Parent Welcome Evening



Mini Woolies



# From the Principal

The first semester of 2026 has been filled with opportunities for our students as we continue our long-standing commitment to providing high-quality education. In this first edition of *Gabe's Gazette* for the year, we share just some of the many highlights from the past six months.

Most importantly, it has been wonderful to see our students continue to grow in confidence and independence as they embrace the many opportunities available to them. Their achievements remind us that success is measured not only by academic outcomes, but also by the personal growth that prepares them for the future.

Our Strategic Plan remains a key priority as we strive not only to maintain excellence but also to respond to an ever-changing world. Through this work, we are ensuring our students and families are well supported throughout their school journey and prepared for life beyond St Gabriel's.

Our commitment to our faith journey remains firmly grounded in the Edmund Rice tradition. Through our sacramental program and our partnership with St Bernadette's Parish, we continue to strengthen the faith life of our School and embed our Catholic values. Our students always look forward to welcoming our parish priests to lead liturgies and celebrate with our community.

Late in Term 2, we were fortunate to have a panel of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) colleagues join us as part of our School Renewal process. This visit enabled us to demonstrate our dedication to the touchstones in providing a Liberating Education, guided by our Gospel Values within an Inclusive Community focussed on Justice and Solidarity for our community. We were delighted to receive very positive initial feedback, with special mention given to the strong sense of community and belonging that is evident throughout our School.

We also continue to build our knowledge of Australia's First Nations peoples through an expanded program of learning opportunities, allowing our students to learn about our shared history through the spoken word as well as on-site experiences.

This semester saw the launch of our new website, a contemporary and functional platform that clearly articulates our vision, mission and commitment to special education. As the front face of our School, the website plays an important role in sharing the St Gabriel's story and connecting with prospective families. We encourage you to visit this site at [www.stgabriels.nsw.edu.au](http://www.stgabriels.nsw.edu.au).

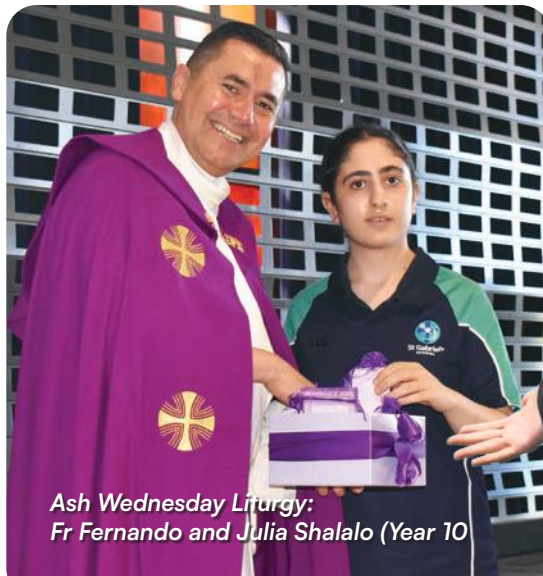
Our School is rich in history, from its humble beginnings as a school for deaf boys, to a small school for students with disabilities, to the thriving community it is today. Throughout this journey of growth and transformation, one thing has remained constant, our positive impact on students and their families.

Our alumni have each experienced St Gabriel's in different ways, yet a common thread runs through every story: a deep affection for the time they spent at our School. As we continue to evolve and stay at the forefront of special education, our commitment to honouring and celebrating our rich history will always remain.

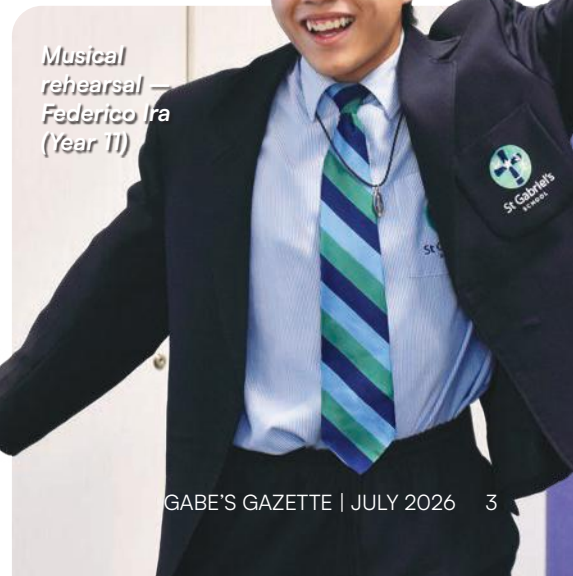
As you read the stories in this edition of *Gabe's Gazette*, I hope you will feel the strong sense of community that makes St Gabriel's so special. Together, they celebrate our achievements from the first half of 2026 and the exciting opportunities that lie ahead.

**David Cook**  
Principal

“...success is measured not only by academic outcomes, but also by... personal growth.”



Ash Wednesday Liturgy:  
Fr Fernando and Julia Shalalo (Year 10)



Musical rehearsal –  
Federico Ira  
(Year 11)

# Never Give Up on Me

Navigating significant challenges in childhood to becoming a student leader in his final years of school, Jonathan Tadros' story is one of resilience, and a family discovering that the future could hold far more than they once imagined.

Jonathan Tadros can tell you the first and last name of almost every NRL player.

"To see him watching a game and yelling out, 'forward pass!' or 'knock on!' It's incredible," says his mother, Tanya.

"Jonathan's taught me everything I know about rugby league. His Dad tries to convince him that he's a Roosters fan, but he loves every team."

Tanya describes Jonathan's elaborate technical set up. After a busy day in Year 12 at St Gabriel's School, he simultaneously watches reruns of conversion kicks on his iPad, ABC Kids on the television, and listens to Morgan Wallen's country music on his iPhone.

Jonathan's father, Sid, says that his son's brain processes words, lyrics and phrases differently to a neurotypical person.

"The first and last lyric, they jump out at him... his mind lives in words. I think that's why he loves music so much."

Jonathan was diagnosed with autism when he was three. His parents, Tanya and Sid, enrolled him at St Gabriel's School in Kindergarten. After attending an Open Day, they were impressed by the close-knit community, small class sizes and the prospect of giving their son a Catholic upbringing.

"I knew it was going to be a difficult road, but it was one less weight off our shoulders," says Sid.

"It was the right place, the only place we wanted for Jonathan. I couldn't stop crying when I got the call to tell me that he was accepted. It was like we won lotto," Tanya adds.

Tanya and Sid say that St Gabriel's provided a second home for their son. Jonathan loves getting dressed in the morning, taking pride in his blazer and leadership badge that is engraved with his position, 'Callan House Leader'.

"He loves feeling important," Tanya says.

"He's funny and mischievous. He calls the teachers by their last names, which always makes them chuckle."

"I remember one of the staff telling me that if Jonathan was neurotypical, he would be the class clown."

For Sid, seeing his son walk across the School grounds every morning and smiling with friends is something he once feared might never happen.

"It was the right place, the only place we wanted for Jonathan. I couldn't stop crying when I got the call to tell me that he was accepted. It was like we won lotto."



Puberty hit Jonathan hard. In Year 7 and 8, his increasing testosterone levels were coupled with an explosion in aggressive behaviour. He struggled to regulate his emotions both at home and at school, heightening his parent's fears regarding his future.

"It was horrendous," says Tanya.

"There were tantrums, sometimes multiple per day. He was removed from school transport to ensure other students' safety. He broke his iPad, threw furniture. He could be extremely violent when he attacked us, our daughter or our dog."

Jonathan's behaviour was especially difficult to manage during COVID-19. His education was disrupted, and his family could not continue schooling at home due to fears for their safety.

"I try not to think about that period, it makes me teary to look back," says Tanya.

Tanya and Sid say that medication changed their family's life, helping to reduce Jonathan's aggressive outbursts and better manage his ADHD and OCD. Throughout the process, they worked closely with St Gabriel's staff, alongside behaviour support practitioners and allied health professionals to provide their son with consistent support both at home and at school.

"When we were at our wits end and struggling to cope, the School saw our family's potential," says Sid.

"We're so proud to see Jonathan come so far from Kindy to Year 12."

"There were so many times we were just in a heap, thinking, 'what are we going to do?'...Even in our darkest moments, I never thought he'd be where he

"I think if Jonathan had a message to the world, it would be 'never give up on me.'"

is today at school, especially in the student leadership team," adds Tanya.

Tanya and Sid reflect on the strength of the friendships they have made with other St Gabriel's parents throughout their son's education. They believe that this support network will allow them to navigate the future as Jonathan prepares to graduate next year.

"I think if we were on our own, we'd be a lot more scared," says Tanya.

She hopes that Jonathan will find meaningful work and support through day programs that will allow him to continue developing his independence. Recent work experience at Access Industries has already provided a glimpse of what that future could look like.

"He worked on the floor packaging Panadol...He really liked it, he felt so accomplished."

Despite her uncertainty, Tanya says her perspective as a mother has changed over the years.

"When your baby is in your arms, you're counting their ten fingers and ten toes and feeling so blessed."

"Jonathan's life might look very different to what we imagined when he was a baby...but now, we're so hopeful that he'll be happy and healthy, and surrounded by people who love him all the time."

Jonathan's ability to read and type, combined with his resilience and determination, stands as a testament to how far he has come and the unconditional support of those who never stopped believing in him.

"I think if Jonathan had a message to the world, it would be 'never give up on me.'"





# Welcome to 2026

On Thursday, 5 February, we held a very special event on our School calendar, our annual Parent Welcome Evening. This event provided an opportunity for parents to meet their child's Teacher and Learning Support Officer while bringing our families together as a community to welcome the new school year.

Parents were invited into their child's classroom to explore the learning environment and gain an insight into the year ahead. Classroom routines, programs and expectations were discussed, giving families a clear understanding of how their child would be supported throughout the year.

As the sun went down, parents and staff gathered on the deck and everyone enjoyed time to connect with one another and meet new families. Principal David Cook spoke about the School's commitment to nurturing each student's individual strengths and working in partnership with our parent community to help every child succeed.

"One of the greatest strengths of St Gabriel's is the partnership we share with our families. When parents and staff work together with a shared vision for each child, we create an environment where students feel supported and able to achieve their personal best. It is wonderful to welcome so many families as we begin another exciting year together."

A special thank you to Emma McGowan (Year 12 parent) for her heartfelt welcome beautifully capturing the spirit

of St Gabriel's and the strength of our family-school partnership. A copy of Emma's speech is printed below.

Our Year 11 and 12 Hospitality students, together with our Year 10 Food Technology students, prepared a delicious array of food for our parent community, proudly showcasing the culinary skills they have developed through their practical learning.

It was a wonderful evening celebrating the strong sense of community that makes St Gabriel's so special.

## Emma McGowan's Speech

"Standing here tonight not just as a parent, but as part of this extraordinary School community, is both an honour and an emotional moment for me.

When you first become a parent of a child with additional needs, you quickly learn that the journey ahead may look different from what you imagined. There can be uncertainty, questions, and at times, worry about whether your child will truly be understood and supported in the world beyond your home.

And then, if you are lucky, you find a place like St Gabriels. Which is what we did, for my son, Will, 13 years ago.

"We are one team, standing on the same side, focused on the same goal: helping our children grow into the most confident, capable and happy versions of themselves."



St Gabriel's is a place where teachers don't just see a diagnosis or a set of challenges. They see our children. They see their personalities, their humour, their preferences, their potential. They take the time to learn what makes them feel safe, what sparks their curiosity and what helps them shine.

As parents, we come into this School carrying deep knowledge about our children. We know their signals, their struggles, and the small victories that mean the world. We also come with trust - trust that the people we hand our children to each morning will care for them, believe in them and work as hard for their progress as we do.

What makes this School so special is that this trust is met with partnership.

Here, communication isn't a formality, it's a lifeline.

We are one team, standing on the same side, focused on the same goal: helping our children grow into the most confident, capable and happy versions of themselves.

And that growth doesn't always come in big, obvious milestones. Sometimes it looks like a new word spoken after weeks of practice. Sometimes, it's a smoother transition in the morning. Sometimes, it's a moment of connection with a peer. These may seem like small things to the outside world, but to us, parents and teachers together, they are huge.

I also want to acknowledge the heart that teachers bring to this work. The patience. The creativity. The emotional energy. You don't just teach lessons, you build trust, you create safety and you help our children attempt things that once felt impossible. As parents, we are deeply grateful.

Partnership also means supporting one another through the harder days. There are times when progress feels slow, when behaviours are challenging or when plans need to change. In those moments, what carries us forward is knowing we are not alone.

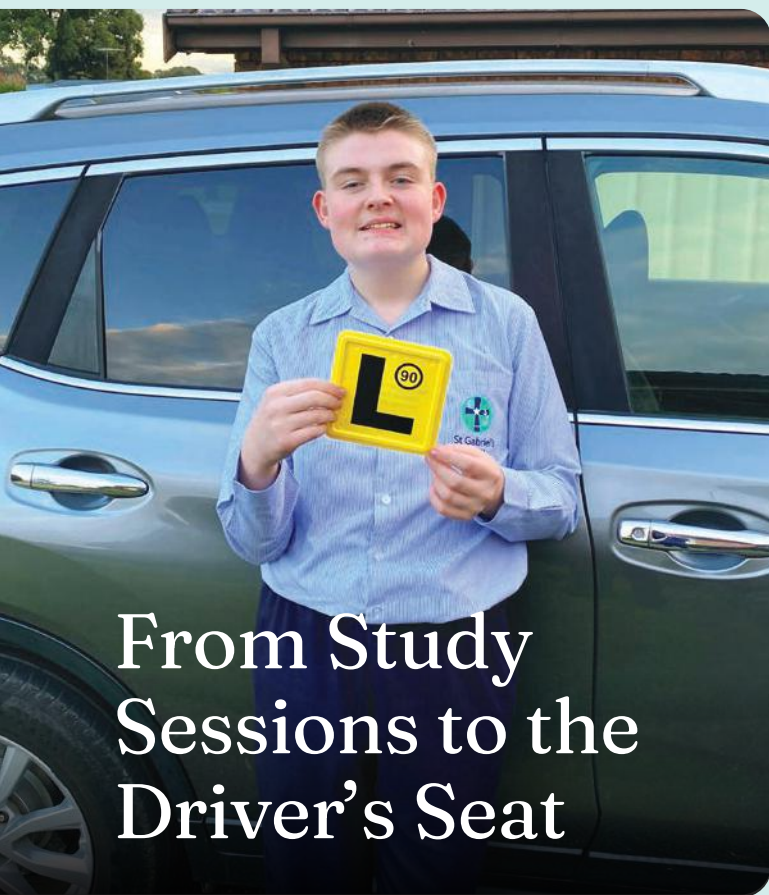
This collaboration does more than help our children learn skills. It shows them something powerful: that the important adults in their lives are united, that they are surrounded by people who believe in them and that they are worthy of patience, understanding and celebration.

As a parent, there is no greater comfort than that.

So tonight, I want to say thank you. Thank you to the teachers, therapists, aides and staff who welcome our children each day with open hearts and open minds. Thank you for listening to us as parents, valuing our insights and treating us as partners.

And lastly, I'd love to welcome the new families to this wonderful St Gabriel's community. You have enrolled your child in a truly special place."

“One of the greatest strengths of St Gabriel's is the partnership we share with our families.”



# From Study Sessions to the Driver's Seat

Passing the Learner Driver Knowledge Test is a significant milestone for any teenager. After hours of study and preparation, it marks the beginning of the journey towards becoming a confident driver.

For Year 11 student Cooper Jarvis, achieving his Ls was the result of many dedicated evenings of practice.

"I had been studying for many nights," Cooper said. "My friend Rhys from Empower Care picked me up and took me to the library where it was nice and quiet. We did lots of practice for the test."

When Cooper successfully passed his knowledge test, his family couldn't have been happier.

"My Mum was so proud of me when I got my Ls," he said.

Soon after, Cooper took his very first drive with his dad in a quiet area near Ropes Crossing.

"My legs were shivering when I was just about to touch the pedal," he laughed. "I was more nervous driving for the first time than I was taking the test."

Now that he has his learner licence, Cooper is looking forward to building his confidence behind the wheel, with the goal of one day driving independently.

"I want to be able to drive by myself," he said. "I'm getting tired of my parents having to drive me around all the time."

Outside of driving, Cooper enjoys creating artwork and hopes to start a business selling his drawings. He's putting the money he earns towards his dream car, a Holden VF SSV Redline ute.



# Swinging into Action

Supporters of St Gabriel's School enjoyed a spectacular day on the greens as they gathered for our annual Golfing for Gabe's Charity Golf Day at Stonecutters Ridge Golf Club.

After days of persistent rain in the lead-up to the event, we were fortunate to be greeted by glorious sunshine, providing the perfect backdrop for a fantastic day on the course.

Parents, local businesses, sponsors and community supporters came together to enjoy 18 holes of golf, with plenty of friendly competition and camaraderie throughout the day. It was a wonderful reminder of the generosity of our community and the difference that can be achieved when people come together to support a shared cause.

One of the highlights of the day was a video featuring our School Captains, who shared what St Gabriel's means to them and how the support of our community helps create opportunities for students like themselves.

Following golf, guests enjoyed a delicious lunch overlooking the picturesque course, where Principal David Cook spoke about the importance of the day and shared exciting plans for the upgrade of one of our Primary playgrounds.

"Golfing for Gabe's is about far more than a day on the golf course," said Mr Cook. "It is a wonderful example of our community coming together to create opportunities that will have a lasting impact on the lives of our students. Every person who plays, sponsors or volunteers is helping us build a future where our students can develop greater independence and confidence."

Congratulations to our winning teams, who displayed plenty of skill and teamwork throughout the day. Team Zheng claimed first place, followed by Dooleys Lidcombe Catholic Club in second and Drummond Golf in third.

We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who helped make Golfing for Gabe's such a memorable and successful day, including the many businesses and individuals who generously donated prizes.

A special thank you to our MC, Phil Batten, who not only kept the day running smoothly but also dedicated considerable time and effort in the lead-up to the event, calling on his extensive network of contacts to help raise funds for St Gabriel's School. His generosity and commitment were instrumental to the success of the day.

We also thank Kate McBurney from Drummond Golf Northmead for her invaluable assistance in coordinating the novelty holes prior to the event. Her guidance helped create an enjoyable experience for all participants.

“Every person who plays, sponsors or volunteers is helping us build a future where our students can develop greater independence and confidence.”

**Silver Sponsors:** Fusion Services Group, Lexus of Parramatta, Mulpha Norwest, Rodriguez Bros, Sione Ala Electrical.

**Corporate Sponsors:** Drummond Golf Northmead, GB Podiatry, Independent Locksmiths & Security, Niemeyer Commercial and Industrial Property, Smith Hancock, The Finance Team, Worthington Homes.



**GOLFING  
FOR GABE'S**

EST. 1997





From rehearsals and backstage preparations to opening night, excitement is building as the St Gabriel's community comes together in September to present our inaugural school musical, *From Little Things*.

For months, anticipation has been quietly growing. Scripts have become well-thumbed and each week our talented cast has gathered to rehearse.

*From Little Things* tells the story of a student faced with the challenge of starting over after a difficult experience at their previous school. Feeling uncertain and out of place, they must find the courage to trust again. Along the way, new friendships are formed, supportive teachers offer encouragement and unexpected opportunities help them discover strengths they never knew they had.

Filled with humour and uplifting music, the production follows one student's journey from uncertainty to confidence, highlighting the positive impact that friendship, encouragement and belonging can have on a person's life.

Musical Co-Directors Ms Soya Thippawal and Mr Adam Miller agree the production has been a wonderful opportunity for students to challenge themselves while discovering new talents.

"This musical is about so much more than performing on stage. It's about working together and celebrating every student's unique strengths. Watching our students grow in confidence with each rehearsal has been incredibly rewarding, and I can't wait for our community to experience what they have achieved together," said Ms Thippawal.

While audiences will see the magic unfold on stage, the production is a whole-school effort. Every student at St Gabriel's will have the opportunity to be involved, whether performing under the spotlight, assisting backstage, helping with lighting and sound or supporting the many tasks that bring a theatrical production to life.

The main cast has been rehearsing every week throughout Term 2. As rehearsals continue in Term 3, preparations will step up another level, with students being selected for our backstage crew.

Performances of *From Little Things* will be held from **22–24 September**. The season will open with a special **matinee performance on Tuesday, 22 September**, where we look forward to welcoming students from local schools to experience the production. This will be followed by two public evening performances on **Wednesday, 23 September** and **Thursday, 24 September**, with both performances commencing at 6.30pm.

Tickets go on sale **9:00am on Tuesday, 1 September**. We look forward to welcoming our community and guests to this very special occasion.



### Support Our Inaugural Musical

We are seeking sponsors to help bring this exciting production to life. Sponsorship will not only support the delivery of our inaugural school musical but will also help raise funds for Gabe's *Tiny Home*, a purpose-built facility where students will learn and practise essential everyday living skills in a realistic home environment.

If you or your business would like to become a sponsor, please contact our Marketing and Fundraising Manager, Allison McNally: [mcnally@stgabriels.nsw.edu.au](mailto:mcnally@stgabriels.nsw.edu.au).



### Aadya (Zoe)

I felt amazing when I was chosen for the musical. I play the character of Zoe. She is kind, a little bit funny and loves zebras. I am most excited about seeing everyone clap for us and I want to show them what I can do.

### Olivia (Rosie)

I play the character of Rosie. She is funny, kind and lots of friends. I was very surprised when I got picked for the musical. My best friend also got picked so, that made me happy. I want people to remember that their hearts can be loved and I hope people are happy and excited to watch it. I am excited to perform in front of my Mum and Dad.

### Maddie (Hope)

I play Hope in the Musical. She likes climbing trees and is funny, brave and hopeful. I was so excited and proud when I found out that I had been given the part. I will be a bit nervous when I go on stage. My Nana, Mum and Dad are coming to see me perform. I love rehearsals because I get to sing, dance and meet new friends.

### Rico (Mr Hiroshi)

I felt so happy when I first got picked for the musical. I play the character of Mr Hiroshi, a teacher. The message of the musical is to be kind and include everyone. I am most looking forward to having my friends watch me. I may be a little scared to perform but I will be happy.

### Harrison (Zelda Clove)

I play the character of the Dad, Zelda Clove. He is a bit of a joker. I think the message of the musical is to be inclusive and kind to everyone. I think I will feel very happy, proud, confident and enthusiastic when I am on stage.

### Catherine (Charlotte)

When I found out I'd been selected as the main character, I was overwhelmed with joy. I relate closely to my character because I've been through a similar experience at my previous school. That connection has made the role very meaningful to me. I'm really looking forward to performing in front of an audience and showing how the support of others can help someone grow in confidence.



**St Gabriel's Return and Earn initiative is giving Year 11 students the opportunity to apply classroom learning in a real-world setting while promoting sustainability and raising funds for classroom resources.**

Since the NSW Government introduced Return and Earn in 2017, NSW residents have embraced the concept. This scheme has now collected more than 15 billion containers equating to \$1.5 billion in refunds. (NSW Government, 2026)

St Gabe's embraced the initiative with our participation in Return and Earn. Since 2025, Year 11C has been participating in the program. Every week, students collect aluminium cans and plastic water bottles from Return and Earn tubs that have been strategically placed around the School.

Year 11 teacher, Ms Zoe Starkey, has led the initiative. She initially linked the program to the Year 11 Mathematics unit *My Financial Life* and says it has evolved into a valuable opportunity for students to develop practical life skills while making a positive environmental impact.

"Return and Earn has given our students a way to apply what they're learning in the classroom to a real-life situation. They're developing financial literacy by earning and managing money, while also building responsibility through following routines and completing a job that makes a positive contribution to our School community," said Ms Starkey.

Beyond developing financial literacy, the initiative has also helped students build confidence, independence and communication skills as they take increasing ownership of the weekly collection process.

"It has been pleasing to see students becoming more confident and capable as they take ownership of the process. They understand and take responsibility for different roles within the program, from carrying collection bags to sorting recyclables," said Ms Starkey.

Year 11 student Robbie Tigani enjoyed being part of the program and understands the importance of recycling.

"It is good for the planet. There is too much rubbish and it helps clean up the environment," said Robbie.

Funds raised through the Return and Earn program are reinvested into the School to purchase resources that support student learning and classroom activities.

If you would like to support St Gabriel's School's Return and Earn initiative by donating your eligible bottles and cans, please contact [info@stgabriels.nsw.edu.au](mailto:info@stgabriels.nsw.edu.au)

# Where Passions Meet Possibilities

From community radio to animal care, Work Placement is giving our Year 12 students the opportunity to build practical skills and explore career pathways to take the next step beyond St Gabriel's School.

During Semester 1, our Year 12 students ventured into the community to undertake Work Placement as part of their TAFE vocational education and training. Working alongside local employers, they developed skills and experienced the expectations of a real work environment. These valuable experiences help students explore future career pathways while preparing them for life beyond St Gabriel's School.

For student, Monique Newman, Work Placement provided the opportunity to turn her love of animals into valuable workplace experience. She completed her placement at *Castle Hill Veterinary Hospital*, where she spent time learning about the day-to-day operations of a busy veterinary clinic while developing practical workplace skills and confidence.

"I've always loved animals, so being able to work at a veterinary hospital was an amazing opportunity," said Monique.

Throughout her placement, Monique worked as a kennel hand, helping to feed and groom dogs, clean kennels and outdoor yards, wash dogs and assist with the general care of the animals.

"The staff were so welcoming and supportive. They took the time to teach me new skills and always treated me with respect."

The experience also opened Monique's eyes to career opportunities she had not previously considered.

"I originally thought I wanted to work in a veterinary clinic, but through my placement I discovered I really enjoy being a kennel hand," she said. "It made me start thinking about what other jobs are available in animal care."

Since completing her Work Placement, Monique has begun exploring future employment opportunities and has identified several kennels that would provide accessible and supportive workplaces after she finishes Year 12. Discovering these opportunities has reinforced her goal of pursuing a career in animal care.

Monique has Stargardt Disease, a rare inherited eye condition that causes progressive central vision loss. Despite this, she said her vision had very little impact on her placement.

"Most of my work was outdoors, so the lighting suited me well. The staff understood my needs, were very patient and made sure I worked with dogs that were appropriate for me. It showed me that with the right support, a career working with animals is definitely possible."

Inspired by her experience, Monique is now completing a Certificate II in Animal Care and hopes to continue

"The staff were so welcoming and supportive. They took the time to teach me new skills and always treated me with respect."



## Mini Woolies Finds Its New Home

Our Mini Woolies has relocated to a new space outside our library. The timing of the new location aligned perfectly with a full refurbishment, which will provide our students a more authentic retail learning environment.

her studies with a Certificate III before pursuing a career working with animals.

Melody Styles spent every Monday morning at community radio station, *Alive 90.5 FM* where she completed her Work Placement.

"I wanted to go to a radio station because I am very passionate about acting and radio and thought it would be a good fit," said Melody.

"Being at *Alive*, opened my eyes to different opportunities and helped me become more independent. The staff were very supportive and welcoming, and I learnt a lot from them."

"On my first day, I was very nervous, but as the day progressed, I became more confident."

Throughout her placement, Melody undertook a range of administrative tasks including assisting with the preparation of spreadsheets, updating operating procedures, assisting with podcast production and assisting with the radio console.

"When I finish Year 12, I would like to study at TAFE and work in administration and acting. I think I will do SLES (School Leavers Employment Supports) which helps people with disabilities get a job," she said.

In addition to work placement, Melody is currently studying a Certificate III in Business through an online eVET course. This has enabled her to develop skills using programs such as Microsoft Excel while strengthening her administrative and critical thinking skills.



For some time now, Mini Woolies has been a part of St Gabriel's learning programs. Currently, students in Years 9 and 10 take part in Mini Woolies as part of their *Work Education* course, while Years 11 and 12 students also use the space as part of their learning. Students increase their skills that assist in building a strong foundation as they move into *Work and the Community*, external work experience and life after school.

Inside the purpose-built supermarket, students undertake tasks including stocking shelves, rotating stock, pricing items, using

point-of-sale systems, maintaining store presentation and customer service.

Along the way, students apply literacy, numeracy, communication, problem-solving and organisational skills in a real-world setting.

"I love the educational aspect of the program," said Year 10 student Catherine Blundy. "It's a hands-on way to learn what jobs are like."

Head of Work Education, Renee Fenech, said Mini Woolies provides students with opportunities to develop skills they will use long after they leave school.

"One of the most rewarding parts of the program is watching students grow in confidence. As they become familiar with their roles and responsibilities, they begin to take more initiative and develop greater independence. Those are the kinds of skills that will support them in the workplace and in everyday life long after they leave St Gabriel's," she said.

With its new home outside the library, Mini Woolies is well placed to continue growing and supporting students for years to come.

# Andrew Walkerden's Life in the Fast Lane

There's something about the revving of engines, plumes of smoke and the sharp surge of adrenaline that has enthralled St Gabriel's alumnus Andrew Walkerden (Class of 2004) since he was a boy.

Most weekends, he can be found trackside at speedways across Australia, immersed in the fast-paced world of go-kart racing.

"I just love it," he says.

"It's the competition, the excitement of racing. My Dad started taking me to the Parramatta Speedway when I was a baby, and that's where my passion for go-karting began."

Since winning his first competition in 2014, Andrew has claimed the prestigious title of Club Champion at Nepean Speedway for seven consecutive years.

"I've also won the New South Wales Titles twice and been a finalist at the Australian Titles. I only just returned from the Victorian Titles yesterday."

While his trophies and titles are reminders of his achievements, Andrew says that some of his most rewarding experiences in the sport have come from encouraging the next generation. On race day mornings, he coaches young drivers in his role as

"It's the competition, the excitement of racing. My Dad started taking me to the Parramatta Speedway when I was a baby, and that's where my passion for go-karting began."

Junior Development Adviser with the Sydney Speedway Kart Club at Nepean.

"I show the kids how to set up their karts and teach them the skills they need to drive fast and safely," he says.

Andrew's passion for motorsport extends beyond the racetrack, fueling his interest in mechanics.

On Saturday afternoons, he works behind the scenes as Crew Chief for the Sprintcar Tour at Eastern Creek Speedway, repairing and fine-tuning cars for competition.

"I always knew I wanted to work with cars," says Andrew.

"I became a panel beater after I graduated high school when I was 16. I've worked at Prestige Auto Salon in Rydalmere since I finished my apprenticeship in 2014."

Andrew attributes his long-term career satisfaction to the supportive, family-oriented culture of his workplace. Before entering the workforce, he worried he might face discrimination because of his hearing impairment, as his older brother had experienced.

"That was one of my biggest concerns after high school. Back then, it was hard for deaf people to find employment," he says.

Andrew was diagnosed with deafness when he was six months old and received a cochlear implant at the age of two.





"I'm glad my Mum and Dad picked up on [my deafness] quickly. I can hear most things now, but it's still difficult sometimes."

Four years ago, Andrew underwent surgery to receive a new implant. He says that hearing is often challenging, and ongoing technical issues require re-adjustments to the cochlear settings every two months.

Andrew says that his education at St Gabriel's School provided the academic and practical skills that have assisted him throughout his life.

"I started at St Gabriel's when I was six months old. I learned through senses, words and pictures, and lived onsite with my parents in a cottage. The staff understood my deafness and always supported me."

Andrew attended St Gabriel's between 1998 and 2004, back when the School only catered to Years K-6. He went on to attend Gilroy College in Years 7-10.

"The teachers at St Gabriel's were so good. I remember Colin in particular, he was probably the best teacher I ever had. He, and many of my other teachers, put so much effort into helping me and the other kids achieve our goals."

"St Gabriel's helped me to become the best version of myself. I still regularly catch up with my friends...I made so many memories there."

In high school, Andrew discovered his love for competitive sport. He played baseball for both Gilroy College and the NSW representative team, and toured to the US to represent Australia.

"When I was 14, I was playing three baseball games a week," says Andrew.

"I played in my own age group, the under 18's, and reps on Sundays. I also played soccer, and we won so many grand finals. I loved it."

Andrew says that his hearing impairment never prevented him from pursuing his goals, whether in competitive sport of his teenage years, his professional career or his passion for go-kart racing.

He speaks proudly of his achievements and offers advice to St Gabriel's students today:

"Find something you love in your life, something that makes you happy, and don't hold back."

## Class of 2025 Reunion

### SAVE THE DATE

Save the date for the Class of 2025 Reunion Afternoon Tea on Thursday, 10 September 2026.

Connect with old friends and share fond memories of St Gabriel's.

Further details available soon.

## Stay connected with St Gabe's

Stay up to date with School news and events by visiting our website and following St Gabriel's on social media.

Contributions to *Gabe's Gazette* are welcome. If you have a news story about an alumni, please contact the School's Marketing and Fundraising Manager:

Allison McNally  
mcnally@stgabriels.nsw.edu.au  
(02) 9634 2367

## Update your details

St Gabriel's Alumni can now update their details with the School at any time online by completing the *Alumni Update Your Details form*. You can find this on the Alumni page.

Make sure you subscribe to *Gabe's Gazette* to stay in the loop.

# SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday, 12 September  
2026

Tickets on sale soon

## Gabe's

# Trivia

## 2026 Night



## St Gabriel's School Musical

22-24 September  
2026

## TICKETS ON SALE

9:00am  
Tuesday 1 September