



# #createwelcome

LIZ DEVINE, HEAD OF HOUSE AT ST RITA'S COLLEGE, CLAYFIELD, IS DETERMINED TO CREATE A POSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE FUTURE, BRINGING THE IMPORTANT WORK OF MDA (MULTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA) TO LIFE FOR STUDENTS AT THE SCHOOL. WE CHAT TO THIS INSPIRATIONAL TEACHER TO FIND OUT MORE.

### Tell us about the aim of MDA...

MDA stands for Multicultural Development Australia. Simply speaking, MDA settles and supports people who are new arrivals in Queensland, be they refugees, students, migrants or people seeking asylum. They give them guidance and help to start their lives here. It's all about inclusion, changing that conversation amongst the power brokers and giving everyone the same opportunities we take for granted to have the best chance of a decent life.

### What inspired you to become so heavily involved with the work of MDA?

Before becoming the Head of Marian House at St Rita's, I worked at St. Patrick's College, Shorncliffe, where I was heavily involved in their social justice and outreach programs. While teaching there I became involved with the Luminous Lantern Parade as a participant for a number of years. Then when I moved to St Rita's, I was thrilled to discover that Marian had MDA as its 'Presentation Ministry',

raising funds and awareness for MDA and their work. I've also become personally good friends with a number of refugees – I find their stories both inspiring and humbling. I think we can all learn from listening to others' stories. Listening to the diverse stories of new arrivals in Australia assists us to appreciate how lucky we are to be born here.

### What programs have you introduced at St Rita's to build multicultural awareness?

For the past three years in my role I have worked to raise the profile of MDA and what they do to the whole St Rita's school community. Events such as the Luminous Lantern Parade that started with eight students walking in the parade in 2015, has now grown to almost 60 students and 11 staff in 2017.

This year, Marian House facilitated a lantern-making workshop which was open to the whole school. We made a wonderful replica of Venerable Nano Nagle's lantern – the founder of the Presentation Sisters. Nano Nagle became known as 'the Lady with the Lantern' for her work →

in reaching out to those who could not afford education in Cork, Ireland. We thought this was a fitting inaugural lantern for our school to carry in the parade. St Rita's was selected as the school to be involved in the 'live cross' to the news on the night of the parade, which was very exciting! A number of students were interviewed about our involvement in MDA on the night.

Marian House also holds an annual 'Bake Off' where students bring an amazing array of beautiful cakes and biscuits to sell to the staff and students of the school. All money raised from this event is donated directly to the 'Donate a Ride' program. This program provides Go Cards for newly arrived refugees to enable them to attend job interviews and make them feel like a worthwhile and participating member of society.

### What has been your favourite event so far?

By far this year's Luminous Lantern Parade – as it showcased that young people are willing and can change the conversation about diversity. It was so peaceful yet powerful to see so many St Rita's students prepared to give up their Friday night to walk alongside newly arrived people in Australia and say 'Welcome'.

### What events/activities do you have planned in the future?

Marian House will also be participating in the 'Welcome Wall' on the MDA website. This is a place where students will create colourful messages of welcome to new arrivals in Queensland, by taking a photograph of themselves holding

this welcome sign, then post it on their personal Instagram page with the hashtag #createwelcome, connecting it then to the MDA website – their growing photo 'welcome wall'.

### How do you think this work benefits the students?

All students need to see glimmers of hope in our world. With increasing bitterness and negativity of some prominent world leaders against people seeking asylum and refugees, it is important that students see that not everyone holds this belief. The students need a voice to be part of a positive, bright and inclusive future. These opportunities for advocacy are critical for them to see that in fact they CAN make a difference. Our school motto is 'Virtute non Verbis' – 'Actions not words'. By actively campaigning for inclusion and diversity in our society, students are, in fact, being women of action right here at school.

### Why do you think it is important to raise awareness of multicultural issues today?

I believe everyone needs to feel as though they have some power to shape the future of society – not just political leaders or people in traditional positions of power brokerage. Advocacy for all people is a positive move forward, demonstrating that many small voices can make big changes. MDA is all about 'changing the conversation' about new arrivals in Queensland – and making that conversation one of welcome and hope for all.

To find out more about the programs at St Rita's College head to [stritas.qld.edu.au](http://stritas.qld.edu.au)

