

18 March 2016

Commitment to special needs learning and mindfulness education win national awards

Two New South Wales teachers will receive national awards at the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA) today at a ceremony in Melbourne.

Keith McMullen from Albion Park Rail Public School, and Radha Babicci from Emmerick Street Community Preschool (Lilyfield) will join 10 other outstanding educators from across Australia in receiving the top awards.

Selected from more than 1100 nominations in 2015, the 12 national award recipients will be honoured for their inspiring and innovative contribution to teaching.

Mr McMullen who admits to walking into 'chaos' when he first started his job was nominated by a parent for a Leadership and Development Award. Mr McMullen's students all have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder combined with other diagnoses such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, anxiety or depression.

Witnessing traumatic and frightening incidents of students experiencing autistic meltdowns, Mr McMullen initiated honest discussion and inclusive negotiation between teachers, students and parents/carers that lead to the establishment of new expectations, boundaries, rules, rewards and consequences. Underpinning these discussions was managing the physical learning environment to support students with special needs and ensure classroom success.

ASG NEiTA Chairman Allen Blewitt says Mr McMullen's resilience is outstanding and he is touched by his 'burning desire to help people'.

"Many teachers in the same circumstances would have given up and Mr McMullen has been hailed 'as a saviour' by parents. These are children who have previously been rejected by other schools, both in the public and private sector. But Mr McMullen is their education hero, demonstrating compassion and spends considerable time researching the best educational tools and techniques to aid and assist each and every child under his care. Mr McMullen has also made a real impact by creating a physical environment that provides safety while also enriching learning, encouraging self regulation and facilitating self-calming and relaxation opportunities."

Radha Babicci from Emmerick Street Community Preschool was nominated by a parent and will receive a Leadership and Development Award for introducing mindfulness techniques to support children's social and emotional skills.

Ms Babicci uses a range of practices with children such as breathing techniques, meditations and yoga and since using mindfulness in the classroom, she has seen children's capacity to focus, listen and stay calm increase. Ms Babicci also educates parents about how to support their children and continue these practices at home.

Mr Blewitt says Ms Babicci is making a positive impact and is a wonderful ambassador to the teaching profession.



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"Mindfulness techniques give children more control about how they're feeling and being in a position to take control and have more assertion over particular incidents, rather than be overcome with emotions and becoming frustrated or angry. This is a true life skill being inculcated at an early age. Ms Babicci also employs mindfulness techniques to help staff effectively cope with the complex and often emotionally demanding role of teaching."

Parents, grandparents, secondary student councils, school boards, councils, parent associations, committees of management and community organisations throughout Australia nominated these inspirational recipients.

Chief Executive Officer of ASG NEiTA, John Velegrinis says the ASG NEiTA recipients make supporting children's education possible and they understand the huge responsibility of educating tomorrow's leaders.

"I congratulate Mr McMullen and Ms Babicci along with the other NEiTA recipients. It is an absolute pleasure to have them as our ASG NEiTA ambassadors and they represent the true epitome of dedicated teachers who genuinely care about the educational success and wellbeing of their students. They are education heroes in their own right and I am deeply touched when the parents tell us their faith has been restored in the education system when they had started to lose hope.

"Instilling a passion for education and a desire to learn is truly one of the greatest gifts that a young person can receive, while education is one of the most critical investments that parents, families and communities can make. This is why ASG NEiTA has thrived for the last 22 years. As national NEiTA recipients, the Australian community says thank you and your contribution to teaching their children and grandchildren is deeply respected and appreciated."

The national awards are divided into three categories: leadership and development, innovation and community engagement. For more information on the 12 national awardees, including profiles go to: <http://www.asg.com.au/neita>

Eleven national award recipients will receive \$5000 professional development grants with one teacher getting the incredible opportunity to go to Space Camp in the U.S. One teacher is also awarded a \$2000 Disability Inclusion Grant.

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Editors notes:

The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) is a member owned organisation, helping to create educational opportunities for children. ASG has been helping families and their children for more than 40 years. During this time, more than 520,000 children have been enrolled with ASG and more than \$2.3 billion in education benefits and scholarship payments returned to members.



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The ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEITA) started in 1994 in Australia and 1996 in New Zealand. Since inception, more than 30,000 teachers have been nominated by the community in the two countries, with more than 1000 teachers receiving about \$182,000 in professional development grants, prizes and endowments.

For more information visit: www.asg.com.au



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