



THE RAILWAY EXPRESS #18

A SPECIAL NEWSLETTER TO HELP US STAY CONNECTED

AROUND THE HOUSE

Well, the curse WAS broken, and Melbourne's 57-year premiership drought came to end with their barnstorming win over the Western Bulldogs in the AFL Grand Final! Congratulations to the Demons supporters in our community (eg. **Richard** from Bike Riding!) and commiserations to any Bulldogs fans.

I am finding it hard to believe that it is Term 4. The year has flown by (although I must admit that these final few weeks (I hope) of lockdown are excruciatingly slow....). I am eagerly awaiting news of when and how we will be able to resume our programs and very much hoping that we are on track to welcome you back at the House at the end of the month. For now, our online programs have resumed, and gardening and food relief continues. Jesse, our Garden Coordinator, made "a very low-budget but high enthusiasm" tutorial about planting tomatoes last week, starring Monday Garden Guardian **Lynn**! Watch it here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dk04nksuscM>.



Don't forget that if you would like to meet up with someone from your group, restrictions now allow for this, and we would love to see you! Staff are in the office Monday to Thursday from 10am - 4pm and we will always make time for a chat. Whilst here, you can drop off your recyclables (small e-waste, soft plastics and now also plastic bread tags), borrow a book from our book trolley and donate food.

It's a busy time of year for staff with our AGM coming up in November, various end of year reporting requirements to be completed and planning for next year. In line with our Strategic Plan, we are keen to involve our community in our planning and we will be in touch soon to seek your input. A member of our choir, **Carolyn**, recently spoke with me about the possibility of a seniors' coffee morning complete with music from the 60s and 70s (dancing optional). I love this idea - stay tuned!



In the meantime, as mentioned in the last newsletter, please consider being involved by joining our committee - we are very keen to have a committee that is representative of our community and would like to encourage people who participate in our programs, and those with a strong connection to the House, to nominate. Please contact me for a chat if you are interested.

I really hope everyone is holding up ok. October 10th is **World Mental Health Day** and the message from Mental Health Australia this year is simple - "Look after your mental health, Australia". As we all know, prioritising our wellbeing and mental health is really important right now and there are lots of things we can do, some of them very simple. For example, did you know that staying hydrated is beneficial to good mental health? For more information, visit:

<https://lookafteryourmentalhealthaustralia.org.au/>

Look after yourselves.

Alison





WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO?

Christina, from our Inclusive Yoga class, wrote in to say "This photo, beside a tea tree, is in the Australian Native Garden in Royal Park, designed by Grace Fraser in 1977. It has been looking wonderful these last months with wattles in full bloom for Wattle Day (September 1st) and now filled with many other flowering wildflowers. The garden is advertised as being a perfect place for picnicking, bird watching and... 'hula hooping'...!! I absolutely agree with the first two, but have given the 3rd suggestion a miss...

With best wishes to everyone,
Christina Gebhardt



After many weeks of separation due to the lockdown, **Jeff** and **Annette** Atkinson were finally able to meet up with their son Chris and grand-daughter Astrid when they organized a picnic on the grass outside Railway House.



And **Leanne** has decided to put up her Christmas tree to bring some light and cheer to the world. Why not?



UPCOMING PLANT STALLS

At each of our upcoming markets (November 14th, December 12th and February 13th) we will have a plant stall, and are hoping for lots of wonderful donations to sell!

If you can grow some seedlings from cuttings or seeds, that would be great. Vegetable, herb and ornamental indoor and outdoor plants are always popular, although anything goes in our plant-loving community.



If you're not sure how to get started, or have any other questions, Jesse can point you in the right direction. She's at Railway House from 10:00 to 1:00, Monday & Thursday.

CALL-OUT FOR JARS

Throughout lockdown our food relief efforts have continued unabated, and there is high demand for basics like tea, coffee, milk and sugar. To help us distribute these items, we need lots of clean small to medium jars. (Labels on is fine.)



If you can donate some, please bring them to the office between 10:00 and 4:00, Monday through Thursday. We're also looking for a volunteer to help portion out these items – please contact the office if you could spare an hour next week. Thank you!

DID YOU KNOW?

All of the back-issues of Railway Express are on our website!

You can find them at:

<https://railwayneighbourhoodhouse.org.au/our-services/covid-19-services/>





WRITERS CORNER

John Harland, a participant in Barry Dickins' writing class, shares a piece he wrote on neurodiversity. This is an abridged version of a fantastic and eye-opening talk John gave at our Community Literary Festival back in March.

NEURODIVERSITY

Genocide can seem very near when you are autistic and advancing gene technologies have ignorant people dreaming of wiping out people like yourself, and your descendants. The stereotype of autism is the loner, lacking social skills, unable to make eye contact and possibly soured by bullying and botched attempts at being social. However, that stereotype is misleading in respect of many autistic people. Rather than lacking social skills, autistic people are often strong in specialist social skills. They may feel lost just hanging out with others, may miss social cues, but come alive when the chance arises to work, and think, together. Rather than seeking to wipe out autism, or to mask it, I contend that we need to educate autistic people to be better at being autistic. Certainly, help them to understand how others think and act, but not simply to mimic them.



I should stress that not all autistic people are great collaborators, because autism is difficult to narrow down. Its psychiatric diagnosis is a scorecard of multiple behaviours, against an imagined "normal". But that pathological diagnosis misses many people whose autism does not markedly impair their everyday lives. Not only is it tricky to identify the common ground, but there is overlapping and interweaving of autism with ADHD ("attention deficit hyperactivity disorder"), dyslexia, ODD (oppositional defiance disorder) and several other traits.

So much so that "neurodivergence" is, arguably, a better concept for non-specialist use. Not a weasel word or euphemism but a more useful grouping. You will appreciate that each of those other labels: autism, ADHD, dyslexia, ODD and the rest, is usually characterised as derangement, defect, disorder, disability, or morbidity. "Neurodivergence" is less judgemental and can emphasise that those traits are linked - even synergistic - aspects of diversity that is vital to the proper functioning of human society. The greatest of intelligence lies in the traits that allow people to collaborate. To network their individual intelligences into a collective intelligence greater than that of the cleverest individual among them.

It is that collaborative intelligence, not the 1500 grams of brain in each individual skull, that is the reality of human intellectual superiority. If we cannot solve a problem alone, we can



call in others to help us think it through together. Other animals work together but few can think together as effectively as we do. Writing, books, the Internet and so forth add to that capacity we have. But one problem is that our basic sociality means that ordinary people (often referred to as "neurotypical" or "allistic") are commonly unwilling to disagree because they don't want to feel marginalised, or to be rocking the boat. Rather than thinking effectively together they reach a state disparagingly referred to as "groupthink" where they are, in reality, agreeing without thinking.

Society needs a sprinkling of people who value ideas over acceptance, who are prepared to think the thoughts others don't dare think and to speak up even when it is impolite to do so. They break the premature consensus of "groupthink" and provoke others to think together, even if no more than to disagree with the neurodivergent person. Neurodivergent people commonly see the world in a wider or narrower view, from a quite different perspective or they see links that others miss.

Diversity itself adds to collective intelligence but the different social skills of neurodivergent people can help in other ways too. Each of these traits clearly does involve compromises and weaknesses, but also strengths. Yet even our weaknesses can help us to use our strengths more-effectively in collaboration because our weak areas are where others can make their unique contribution.

That should not have us thinking that achievement rests only in cooperation and being nice. Competing enthusiastically is one of the joys of working together and the greatest of collaborative achievement is a balance and interplay of competition and cooperation, calm and passion. Valuing diversity is not just decorum or being nice, but about our collective strength and survival.

So, why isn't everyone neurodivergent? In broad terms, human society requires a certain proportion of neurodiverse thinking to function effectively. Neurodiverse people tend to be the discoverers and innovators, chasing ideas and knowledge despite disapproval from those who cherish stability. But too high a proportion of neurodiverse traits in the community threatens stability. Stability and responsiveness need to be in balance. It does appear that neurodiverse traits are more common in pre-agricultural societies. What we see as neurotypical social skills now may have been an adaptation of civilisation and its need for increased stability. The ability to socialise without destabilising levels of thought.

Normality is relative. Learning in baby apes is extraordinarily fast then the rate tapers off through infancy, then drops a bit lower with maturity. To begin with, human babies learn only as fast as other apes, but they sustain a high rate of learning much longer. That comes from what biologists call neoteny meaning that human beings remain like infant apes in our brain : body ratio and in our appearance. That neoteny assisted the evolution of our larger brain and our capacity to continue learning well after physical maturity. Autism



and ADHD are both associated with delayed and incomplete maturation of the brain. Although commonly disparaged as "immaturity", it can reasonably be seen as enhanced neoteny. It allows yet-higher rates of learning for longer than even the human norm, with extended time for brain growth and development as well as enhanced neuroplasticity into old age.

Seeing neurodiversity as a balance of strengths and shortcomings, and contribution to a healthy society might change how we rear neurodivergent children. We might help them to be better at being who they are, rather than teaching them to pretend to be neurotypical. That pretence of being neurotypical doesn't work well, anyway, but creates a great deal of stress because masking neurodiverse traits is emotionally draining. That stress distracts from achievement as well as bursting out in occasional "meltdowns" and other stress symptoms.

Rather than teaching mimicry, it is valuable to educate people - neurodivergent and neurotypical - to understand each other and to work together. We can help neurodivergent people to learn how to allow for their own traits, and to understand how they are seen. by others. Traits including enhanced sensitivities to touch, smell, sounds and light, particularly flashing light, along with poor coordination, difficulty with eye contact, meltdowns, utter bafflement about social cues and a range of other traits. However, it is also vital to help other people to understand and not be offended by those traits in neurodivergent people.

In summary, neurodiversity is essential to human survival. Neurodiverse traits bring gifts as well as costs. Education of neurodivergent people needs to focus on their becoming effectively neurodiverse rather than teaching them only to mimic "normal" behaviours. Rather than targeting neurodiversity we need to target the toxic folly of eugenics. Difference is not disorder.





LET'S TALK FOOD

The unstoppable **Charles Strebor** is at it again with another mouthwatering recipe, this time for fudge. Those of us who have been lucky enough to sample this fudge can attest to its deliciousness!

SALTED CHOCOLATE FUDGE

Ingredients:

- 1 tin (395gm) condensed milk
- 400gm chocolate (use your favourite, I prefer dark)
- 2 heaped teaspoons peanut butter
- 1 heaped teaspoon salt flakes
- 1 heaped teaspoon roasted wattle seeds*



Instructions:

1. Break chocolate into pieces
2. Heat condensed cream in pan on low until warmish
3. Turn off heat on stove
4. Put chocolate pieces into condensed cream, stir until mixed
5. Put peanut butter into mixture, stir but not completely as you want to see stripes of peanut butter when done
6. Get a glass baking dish, approximately 23cm by 23cm, cover with plastic wrap
7. Sprinkle wattle seeds onto plastic in baking dish
8. Gently pour mixture over wattle seeds
9. Smooth mixture evenly, sprinkle with salt flakes
10. Refrigerate for at least two hours (I prefer overnight)
11. Cut into slices in a size that you might like to eat
12. Eat!

* *Optional, and available from health food stores*





TOP PICK



Nick Jans has written in to recommend a podcast:

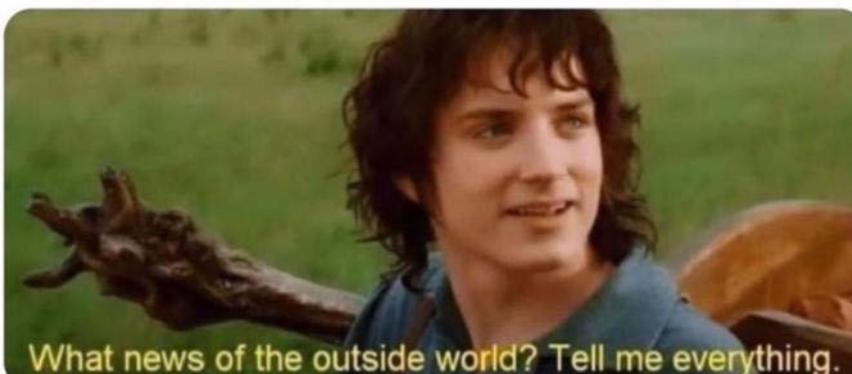
“‘Sticky Notes: The Classical Music Podcast’ is for anyone who loves classical music, or is just getting ready to dive in for the very first time. It’s the creation of Joshua Weilerstein, who conducts symphony orchestras in both Boston and Lausanne. Most episodes analyse – in ways historical and sociological, as well as musical – a particular piece of classical music: for example, the latest one focuses on Mozart’s ‘Jupiter’ Symphony. Over the years, he’s done that for most of the great pieces. But the show occasionally diverts from individual compositions to present us with a number of intriguing topics, such as ‘How to Be a Film Composer’ and ‘Politics in Classical Music’.



Judy and I love it. Every episode is engaging, even for people like us who have been hooked on the classics for ages. Get it from your favourite podcast source (such as the iTunes store), or listen to it on your computer or device by clicking on <https://stickynotespodcast.libsyn.com/>.”

LOCKDOWN LAUGHS

When someone in the house returns from the grocery shop





AND FINALLY...

Get vaccinated in Brunswick this weekend!

Brunswick Secondary College is hosting a pop-up COVID-19 vaccination clinic where you can get vaccinated.

You can walk in to get vaccinated, or you can make a booking at portal.cvms.vic.gov.au. The clinic is providing first and second dose vaccinations.

Brunswick Secondary College is located at 47 Dawson Street, Brunswick.

The clinic is operating on:

- Saturday, 9 October (10am – 6pm)
- Sunday, 10 October (10am – 6pm)

Vaccinations available :

- Pfizer vaccine: People aged 12-59 years
- AstraZeneca vaccine: People aged 60 years and over
- For Pfizer second dose, your first dose must have been at least 3 weeks ago.
- For your second AstraZeneca dose, your first dose must have been at least 6 weeks ago.

How to book:

Bookings preferred. Walk ins accepted.

Book online at portal.cvms.vic.gov.au

or call 1800 675 398 and say you want to book at 'Brunswick Secondary College



Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 protects you, your loved ones and our whole community.

