

# MUTUAL SUPPORT

“Mutual Support is an essential ingredient of the Mater Dei Community. Parents appreciate it, staff need it and students thrive on it. However, our parents don’t always find an avenue to experience it in a personal way. ‘Conversations for Nurturing Independence’ is a program that gives them this opportunity” says Sister Jeanie Heiningers, who with her assistant Janette Koelmeyer, offers this program each term to a small group of parents and carers.

Recently Sister Jeanie facilitated a very unique group. It included three foster parents.

Kate and Bill Morris (pictured right), have fostered 19 children over the years. At the moment they are fostering a brother and sister, one of whom attends Mater Dei. They told how they experience the love of these children in a more profound way than they have with their own children.

Linda McCarthy (pictured left) and her husband also foster a brother and sister, one of whom has completed, and one of whom is currently attending, our Early Intervention Program.

Linda shared some experiences as an example of the additional challenges these families face.

“Only six months after receiving our daughter, my husband was playfully wrestling with his teenage nephews and brother-in-law and our daughter looked very agitated and fearful”. Linda explained “I didn’t know whether she had witnessed violence in her family of origin or somewhere else.” She also said that both of their children want to know where we



are, all of the time. “If they become separated from us in a shopping centre for instance, they become distraught and start screaming”.

Also pictured is Kelly Cutler (second from left), whose son Ryan started at Mater Dei this year. Kelly said that she was grateful for the support the group provided. For her, it also highlighted how foster parents have to deal with additional unknowns for much of the time.

Sister Jeanie believes that Mater Dei parents and carers have to find ways to harness the energy to cope with each new stage of their child’s development on a daily basis. “This calls for grit, tenacity and a robust faith in themselves, professionals and the God who listens to us and loves us into each new stage of the journey”.

*If you would like to know more about the Conversations for Nurturing Independence Program at Mater Dei contact Sister Jeanie on 4655 7481*