

THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY DINNER 2017

An Initiative of the Diocese of Bathurst Workplace Gender Equality Committee

The International Women's Day dinner held last Thursday evening highlighted the true extent of what ordinary women can do in extraordinary ways. Barbara Bonfield, a sight impaired motivational presenter for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, shared her inspirational and compelling life story which made for a most enjoyable dinner. Barbara discussed her life challenges and the ways in which her guide dogs have assisted her in leading an active and fulfilling life. Barbara has been sight impaired from an early age and had struggled to gain her independence within the wider community. Due to the loss of sight, Barbara had to learn to navigate her own way around her home town of Bathurst. Barbara never travelled alone as she was always accompanied by either her siblings, cousins or her loving husband. At one point in Barbara's life journey, she and her family had to move from her home town due to her husband's work commitments.

Moving to a new town was going to pose a new set of challenges for Barbara. Initially Barbara was scared to leave the house to go to places of necessity, such as the grocery store, as the new township was unfamiliar and there was limited support for her at the time. This led to Barbara making the choice to have a guide dog. This decision would mean some compromises would have to be made and specialist training for both the guide dog and Barbara would take considerable time and energy. Barbara has owned four guide dogs over her lifetime. Through the skill and training of the guide dogs, Barbara regained her independence to undertake the everyday tasks that many of us take for granted. Her current guide dog, Samara, is well trained and very much loved by Barbara's family. Samara becomes Barbara's eyes and helps guide Barbara's every step even into the unknown and unfamiliar.

Throughout Barbara's sharing, the audience was intrigued by her life story and Barbara's tenacity and resilience to meet every challenge as it arose with both humour and strength. The importance of supporting people who are sight impaired with the appropriate assistance was made evident. Donating to Guide Dog NSW/ACT for training facilities for these special dogs was very much encouraged.

