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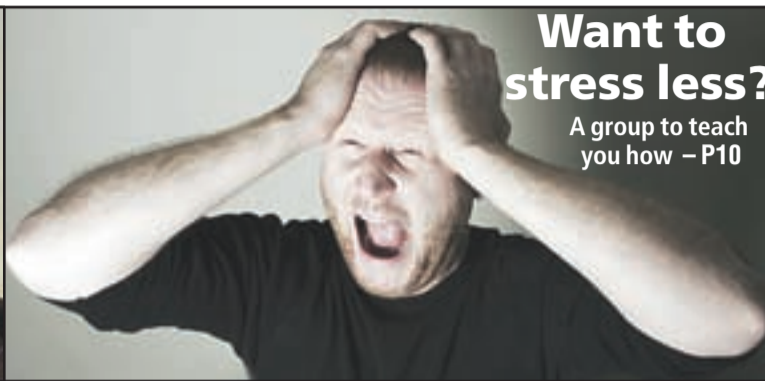
Thursday, March 4, 2010

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Secret garden saved



Saved just in time: Marianne Farrar (far left), volunteers and members of NADO, Richmond Club's CEO Kimberley Talbot (fourth from right) and Peter Ford (far right) are all ecstatic The Secret Garden will now stay open.

by Cerise Burgess

ONE week after the devastating news the Secret Garden would be forced to close, the Hawkesbury community, led by Richmond Club, has rallied together to save it.

Feelings of utter dismay and despair turned to elation and relief yesterday for the many volunteers and employees of the service, with the announcement funding had been secured to ensure its survival.

As revealed in *the Gazette* last week, The Secret Garden, in the University of Western Sydney's Hawkesbury campus, was facing the axe this week if it couldn't find funding.

Kimberley Talbot, Group CEO of the Richmond Club, announced yesterday the club would be giving The Secret Garden \$18,000 to help it maintain its important role for our community's people with a disability.

"This is a vital community resource and to think they were going close is just horrible,

something needed be done, so we stepped in, we had to," Ms Talbot said.

"I am very passionate about keeping the garden open and enhancing the whole organisation. Nobody knows how to meet the local disabled communities needs better than our locals and we have to protect that."

Ms Talbot said the club was giving the garden the money when the "truth is that we don't even really have the money to give".

"The Community Development Support Expenditure Scheme (CDSE) doesn't support this type of service because there are wages involved," she said.

"So we are stepping in and giving them the money without funding, and are asking the community to help us help them."

Peter Ford, vice chair of Hawkesbury Skills Inc, the organisation which runs the garden, couldn't be happier with the result.

"This place [the garden] is so important to me and the people who come here and to know

that it's been saved it truly mind-boggling," Mr Ford said.

"A thank you from the bottom of my heart goes out to the Richmond Club and the locals who have rallied together to save this amazing place.

"We received a few thousand in donations from locals and to know they are behind us, as well as the club, is a great feeling."

Mr Ford said although Richmond Club is giving them the funding to stay open, there is still a lot of work to be done.

"We aren't out of the woods yet, we still need volunteers desperately and still need to secure a long-term solution to the problem of funding, but the fact the community and the club is there supporting us really helps us to stay positive," he said.

Marianne Farrar, the nursery manager, and Aleisha Morgan, both work at the at the gar-

den and said they were "over the moon" after hearing the news.

"I was distraught to think this place was closing, I couldn't stop thinking about where everyone that comes here was going to go" Mrs Farrar said.

"But now I am ecstatic to know we won't be going anywhere, it's just truly amazing and so wonderful. I can't thank the club and the locals enough."

Aleisha Morgan said she was so grateful for the support they have received and is happy she can continue her apprenticeship there.

"I love this job and everything that this place represents. I am very happy and relieved to know we are staying open," she said.

To help raise money for The Secret Garden Richmond Club will be organising several fundraising activities including a charity race day in August.

There will also be signs displayed in the club and tins for donations starting this week.



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