

ME

Alumni

EARLY YEARS TO HIGH SCHOOL



Andreina Amato, ME Alumni Coordinator

A Montessori East high school seems to be on top of many people's minds when we talk about the Lighthouse Project. What will it look like? Where will it be? How will it be different? Will my child graduate in time before it opens? There are so many questions, which, when all is revealed, will make this project to create a community campus so exciting. With this theme in mind I reached out to our American friends at the Hershey Montessori Middle and High School to share some beautiful images of their farm school and to speak to the Hilson sisters, one of which, Athena, a Montessori East alumna, about her experience at a Montessori High School.

We're also excited to announce a new home for the under 3 parent program opening in Bondi Junction. Raji shares her dream on page 4 to help more parents to follow their intuition and know their input in the early years will set the foundations for the adult they will become. Former parent, Nicky Ross, writes to this very point in her story on page 7 about her son, Bernard, and his special bond with Cycle 1 pal, Alex Osborn.

This is an exciting end of year issue taking you on a journey of 'planes' from early childhood to adulthood and the value Montessori brings to every age. If you have a story to share please contact us.

E: alumni@montessori.nsw.edu.au

ME ALUMNI TODAY

The Most Incredible Experience of My Life. Hershey Montessori Farm School, USA.

In 2014, at the tender age of 12, Athena Hilson left the safe haven of her community at Montessori East and her family home to travel to the United States of America to become a boarder with 20 other teenagers from around the world at the Hershey Montessori Farm School. For many parents this would be a bigger than life decision to send their child to the other side of the world but for Athena, it was the most incredible experience of her life.

"I loved all of it really," she shares with joy from her grandparent's home in Bowral, still jet lagged after her recent return from the USA.

"It's an experience I am going to miss. I'm going to miss the kind of relationships I had with my teachers. We felt like they were our equals and we all called each other by our first names."

Athena has graduated from middle-school (12-15 program) returning after three years to join her older sister, Chiara, at St Hilda's School Gold Coast. Due to the different school calendar, Athena is home schooling until she starts in January 2018.

The farm life made a huge impression on Athena, coming from a typical urban setting in Sydney's east.

"Getting the experience on the farm meant a lot to me and I enjoyed gardening.

"We were 20 kids and we did everything for ourselves - the cooking, cleaning, growing our own food, taking care of the animals.

continued over page...



Athena Hilson, Hershey Montessori Farm School, USA



Hershey Montessori Farm School, USA

"If there was anything that wasn't working we always worked it out together and if we disagreed on a rule we would present a business case to the school committee to make a change."

As Chiara points out, who spent four years at the Hershey Montessori Farm School, "it is a strange transition to move from a small residential school where we do everything ourselves to a large boarding school (St. Hilda's) where the meals are cooked for you."

For Chiara the farm formed a big part of her personal development.

"We had to be responsible, which helped me behave more responsibly in every aspect of my life and mature quickly."

Athena echoes this sentiment and adds, "if there was a Hershey school equivalent in Australia, I would be there."

The Huntsburg Campus, in Ohio, is the first farm school of its kind to fully implement Dr. Montessori's philosophy

on education for adolescents. Maria Montessori understood that adolescence is a time of intense preparation for adult life, and as such, requires focused study on how humans live and work together.

In addition to learning standard curriculum; math, science, history, language and arts, teachers guide students to gain experience in life skills, including entrepreneurship, working with fellow students and managing a budget.

Both Chiara and Athena were thrilled to hear about the Lighthouse Project and the proposal for creating the high school.

"It's so great you guys are starting one. We really need it. There aren't many options out there," adds Chiara quite seriously.

Very few people want to go to school, Chiara has noticed from her peers.

"I'm grateful for my Montessori education. The school instilled in me a love for learning. Everything fascinates me and I want to learn more."

"Some of my friends have even said they're jealous they haven't had the same style of education as me."

Chiara, 16, has an engineering scholarship at St Hilda's and is studying; engineering, maths, physics, modern history and English. Her dream is to work in poor and developing communities in the field of alternative energy and sustainable living, where she can integrate her passion for mathematics and engineering.

"Montessori set me up with a good approach to maths. A lot of my friends are behind. I have been coaching one friend showing her a hands-on approach with materials. Her grades have gone up from a grade B to a grade A. I feel good that I can help someone. I just don't understand why others don't have access to the same materials?" she adds emphatically.

The siblings haven't seen each other for almost six months and you can hear the excitement in their voices as they banter about their experiences at the farm school.

I ask Athena, why did you come home if you enjoyed it so much? "Three years was enough time to be away from home and on the other side of the world." One

ME ALUMNI TODAY

can tell these girls are close and how fantastic for them both that they have shared such an inspiring educational path together.

Athena and Chiara's mother, Julia Hilson, a Montessori educator, explains that the Montessori Farm School education has definitely given the girls a deeper awareness of what it takes to work harmoniously in a group.

"Working as part of a team and dealing with challenging behaviours has shown both girls an awareness of the needs of others, looking for solutions and working together."

"Learning is still such fun for the girls. The relationships they had with their teachers have enhanced this desire to learn more about the world. They would have respectful deep discussions and the teachers would encourage lots of questioning."

Athena and Chiara have an older sister and brother, whom both also attended Montessori schools. Chiara, now in grade 11, often gives talks on the benefits of going to a Montessori adolescent community school.



Chiara and Athena Hilson

Message from ME Foundation Chairman Nick Tobias



Nick Tobias

What's so great about Montessori East is that there is always something to celebrate, look forward to or aspire to create.

Since our last newsletter to the community it has been all systems go behind the scenes, putting the building blocks in place for the early stages of The Lighthouse Project. Teams have been formed, a creative agency

appointed, numbers are being crunched and locations are being scrutinized. The project is taking shape and there is excitement in the air.

Opening the Bondi Junction centre is an early adoption of the Lighthouse Project and a testament to the school's commitment to taking the first steps in making this campus come to life. The centre will accommodate our growing

0-3 toddler and parent community and will be the space for our teacher training with our first classes starting in December.

I am looking forward to the next ME Foundation and Alumni Community event in early 2018 where we will have more information to share on the progress of the Project.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the entire alumni and school community for your support and the time each and every one of you invests in individually making Montessori East what it is today. I would also like to welcome the 2017 Cycle 3 graduates and their families into the alumni community. You add enormous value to the history of our school, and we look forward to staying connected and following your personal stories in the future.

E: nick@tobiaspartners.com



Raji Sivapalan and Tea Bezos

The Centre for Parents & Educators Opens

We are excited to announce that this February 2018 we will be opening our very own Montessori East premises in Bondi Junction for the infant and toddler parenting program and Montessori teacher training facility.

For almost five years the under 3 program has been operating in the St Patrick Church Hall next to Montessori East. Initially the program started with a handful of families with few materials and furniture and quickly grew to seven sessions with 94 families every week and hundreds on the waiting list.

The new permanent space will allow guiding teachers, Raji Sivapalan and Tea Bezos, to expand the program to five days a week, create a fixed environment, unlike now where they set up and pack away after each class, offer more places and launch more classes for the growing pregnancy to four month parenting introductory program.

"This program gives parents a good understanding of the Montessori philosophy before they meet the challenges of parenting, and for some, prepare them during the transition from a couple to a family."



Children at work in 0-3 Cycle

"It has been of great value to families," says Raji, the longest standing teacher at Montessori East and the school's family and community counsel.

Parents, Carla and George Taxidis, started the infant program while their baby was still in hospital receiving special care. For them it was like 'therapy' they said. Their daughter Zoe is now 18 months and attends the Toddler Community.

For parent, Zoe Law, who started the program while expecting her first child, says the pregnancy program has empowered her to respect this little human being before his birth.

As part of the extended program, Raji and Tea help families create their own 'tribes' so they can form supportive friendships and meet outside of the weekly classes. "We want to create an oasis for families to feel safe and ask questions and not feel judged by their parenting," says Tea.

"Creating community is pivotal in bringing up a child and it is a wonderful thing for likeminded families to come together. We really want to help that process for them," says Raji.

For principal, Bill Conway, opening this centre is an exciting first step in the journey toward the Lighthouse Project.

"Our vision is to create a community campus by 2022 that will be a model for other schools to follow in communities around the world. This premise' is a first step in the creation of the Lighthouse campus, which will include the infant and toddler parent program, an extension of the current pre and primary school, the addition of a high school, teacher training facility and community centre."

The new space at Bondi Junction will also be used for Montessori teacher training, parent education evenings, community events and talks.

The first Montessori teacher training course will start at the centre in December 2017.

My dream for the program is to empower more families and guide them gently with their parenting. Encourage them to not be swayed by social pressure and opinion, to be strong within themselves, to learn to appreciate their own innate parenting intuition while integrate the Montessori philosophy.

The name of the centre is still under construction and we would love to hear from the community for any suggestions of names. Please email Kathryn Wyer at kathryn.wyer@montessori.nsw.edu.au with your ideas.

Address:

Level 2, 360 Oxford Street
Bondi Junction NSW 2022

Website:

www.montessori.nsw.edu.au

ME ALUMNI TODAY

Harper in Texas

Harper Smith graduated from Cycle 3 in 2016 and moved to Austin, Texas with her family in 2017. Her three brothers, Morgan, Campbell and Truman were also at Montessori East.

Harper shares her experience moving country, moving school and starting high-school. A lot for a 12-year old.

Q. Which school are you going to now?

O'Henry Middle School, Austin Texas.

Q. How was the transition from ME to your new school?

It took me a while to learn my way around the school since it is a lot bigger, I even walked into the wrong class on my first day. It was hard for me to catch up with everything because I came mid-term. There are a lot more kids there so I don't actually know everyone at the school; I don't even know some people in my grade. Also it was hard for people to learn my name they thought I was saying "Hoppa" not "Harper".

Q. Any first words that come to mind to describe your first day at your new school?

Exciting, rowdy, social, hectic, different and surprising.

Q. What do your current school friends say about where you went to school?

We don't really talk about Montessori East. They ask questions like, "Have you seen a real life kangaroo?" or "Do you like vegemite?"

Q. What do you enjoy the most about your new school?

I have a bigger selection of people to be friends with. We have four core classes, math, science, English and Texas history. We get to pick three other classes (electives) to take. My electives are Jr Police Academy, athletics and Spanish. I also enjoy the cafeteria because it is so big and fun to eat lunch in.



Left to Right: Campbell, Sally, Morgan, Truman, Shane and Harper

Q. Has your Montessori experience influenced the person you are today, and if so in what way?

Yes, I tend to grasp lessons a bit quicker than other kids in class. I think Montessori helped me process information and understand ideas presented to me in different ways.

Q. What are you doing when you're not at school? (hobbies, sport, passions)

Hanging out with friends or family, homework or playing basketball and volleyball. I also do a thing called 'Wyldlife' (yes it's Wyldlife not WILDLIFE). It is a club where you play super fun games every week. We do fun stuff like make breakfast on someone's head, play tennis with an orange, chicken trivia and fun activities like that.

Q. What do you value the most about your Montessori experience?

Montessori helped me become independent and organised. This has been really helpful now that I am at middle school because we get lots of homework. I never leave my homework to the last minute like some of my new friends. I loved walking to Montessori East with my friends in the morning and

home again in the afternoon. I think this is why mum and dad were ok with me and my friends going to the beach by ourselves. I miss Bondi so much.

Q. What do you miss the most about ME?

My friends, teachers, the amount of freedom we got, the classroom isn't -50000 degrees, no homework, the bond you have teachers and good canteen food!

Q. Any messages you would like to share with your alumni class mates of 2016?

Don't ever get up when the bell rings, keep that in your mind! Never forget about tests. Here's a tip for you if you go to a school like mine... Always walk on the left (well right for me) unless you want to get trampled on, but also don't stand too close to the doors in the hallway because they could swing open at any minute and give you a good old bruise on the forehead.

Overall middle school, what we call high school in the States, is really fun and you should not be worried about it. Just stay out of drama and be a good person. Also, last thing, never ever procrastinate on doing homework, projects and assignments.

WILLIAM LIVING THE DREAM

William Jensen, Entertainment Producer, 37

Graduated Cycle 2 Montessori East

Q. What are you doing now?

I primarily work as a producer/project manager within the live entertainment industry (theatre, dance and mega events for the most part). Recently I finished a project as one of the producers on the Opening Ceremony of the 5th Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. <https://vimeo.com/234189350>

Q. Why do you like what you do?

I am part of telling a story. I enjoy working with great people that are passionate about what they do too. I enjoy the creative process, challenges and variety depending on what the project is.

Q. Is there anything from your Montessori days that you apply to your life and/or work today?

Understanding, respect and openness for others and their cultures enabling you to work together.

Q. What are your dreams for the future?

To be one of the world's leading entertainment producers.



Opening ceremony, 5th Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Ashgabat

FRIENDS FOR LIFE

By Nicola Ross, Montessori East Parent, 1991 - 2000

Bernard, 29, and Alex, 30, met at Montessori in early 1991 when they were three and four. Their bond was nurtured under the watchful eye of Raji and they became good friends from the outset. Their playground was Parsley Bay and Neilson Park where they met after school.

Bernard and Alex both finished the Cycle 1 program in 1990 – 1993 at the Vauluse campus. The move to primary school did not change their friendship. They always had time for each other.

The Osborns returned to Boston in 2000 after 10 years in Sydney. At the time of their departure a close friend from Montessori commented that Bernard and Alex seemed to be connected at the hip. Certainly when Alex left, Bernard naturally felt an enormous sense of loss. Fortunately their friendship has endured and for me as Bernard's mother it is wonderful for me to see that. The boys can meet up every few years and there is an unspoken understanding stemming from a shared background and values nurtured at Montessori.

As the years went by it got more complicated to organise long distance

'play dates'. Bernard was invited to go on holidays with Alex's family to Chocorua, New Hampshire, when he was 10 and 13. Soon after that Alex celebrated a Christmas and New Year, and later an Easter, with us. It wasn't until 2012, almost ten years later, when they caught up again, this time when Bernard was travelling through Mexico and the USA.

This year Bernard and his partner, Abi, moved to Seattle and Alex and Bernard

spent a long weekend together in Chocorua. I asked Bernard how it was seeing Alex after almost five years and he mentioned the times have changed but they are both the same people.

It is difficult to express the satisfaction I feel when I observe the sense of connection which exists to this day between Bernard and Alex. I would put that down to a very special environment they were fortunate enough to explore together.



1988: Alex and Bernard



2017: Bernard and Alex

THE 28TH INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI CONGRESS, PRAGUE, 2017

By Bill Conway, Montessori East Principal

Fifteen Montessori East educators from Montessori East joined 1800 delegates from over 72 countries for a 4-day conference this June. Everyone returned inspired, motivated and bonded in our quest to further serve the children in our care.

The theme of the congress was pathway to peace, starting with the self and developing through to others (family and educators), society (agents of social change) and the universe (peace and ecological unity). This theme was so well aligned with our vision for Montessori

East and our Lighthouse Project mission, to empower our children for a better world. It certainly further cemented my personal resolve to think outside the box and beyond the school and community we are aiming to create; to act with a global outlook but start local – with a local community campus.

Attending the Congress en masse could have only happened with the complete support of the Montessori East community. We are extremely grateful to the ESMA board and to all the parents for accommodating this change to our calendar to support our attendance. There is no doubt in my mind that our participation will have profound and far-reaching effects on our school, in particular on our future plans of growth for the Lighthouse Project.



Montessori East delegates 2017

VOLUNTEERING FOR YOUTH

Liz Trollip, Alumni Parent of Ben (27), Hannah (23), Alex (21) and Michael (21)

Liz has been volunteering with a friend at the Kings Cross Wayside Chapel Youth Space for almost five years.

“One day a week we prepare a meal with the youth who attend the Wayside Chapel, we then sit down and eat together,” says Liz.

“The people we tend to cook with are between the ages of 14 and 26, and often have had challenging upbringings and are experiencing difficulties.

“We have found that preparing and sharing meals together provides a comfortable space for them to talk if they want to.”

Liz and her friend were looking for a way to spend time together whilst doing something meaningful.

“It took a while to find a charity where we felt we could be useful. The Wayside Chapel offered a well-run program and is an open door to all youth.

“Volunteering with a friend has worked well as it has strengthened our relationship, and has made our commitment manageable, as generally at least one of us is able to turn up every week.

“The staff and volunteers are very hard-working and respectful, and are able to challenge the youth in a positive way.

“Working with disadvantaged youth makes you realise how lucky our kids are. I had three of my children in Raji’s care. She truly respected each as an individual, which is exactly how the people at Wayside Chapel want to be treated.”

Liz Trollip was a Montessori East parent from 1993 – 2008.



Liz and Colleagues