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MEDIA RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March, 2011

Brisbane Charity Lifts The Lid On Colourful History

What do a former US President's wife, Second World War English navy officers and children with physical disabilities all have in common? They're all part of the rich tapestry woven into the history of a local charity, which is now set to release a spectacular coffee table book chronicling its past.

MontroseAccess, which offers disability care for kids in Queensland, commissioned an historian to undertake a three year research project to uncover and capture its colourful past since the charity was formed in 1933. The book is being launched at Government House in Brisbane on Wednesday March 16th.

MontroseAccess CEO, Darrel Bourke, said: "The charity started in the early 30's looking after children living with the effects of poliomyelitis. Since then we have expanded to care for children with a wide range of rare and undiagnosed physical disabilities across the entire state. Over that time, we have been pioneers in helping these children to reach their maximum potential and ensure they live quality lives."

Local historian Helen Gregory researched and wrote the 110 page book, and uncovered some remarkable stories through her interviews with Corinda residents, former clients and staff. Most notably, she discovered a letter from the White House in 1943 from Eleanor Roosevelt, a former US president's wife. The letter was a thank you to the American Red Cross for organising events and hard to come by treats for MontroseAccess children.

"There's British connections too. During the war, British naval ships were stationed on the Brisbane River, and the naval officers would come and collect the MontroseAccess children for day outings. They even hosted a pirate party on board HMS Ramshead. This was incredible at a time when disability was not so well understood," Helen said.

The biggest challenge facing the charity over the years has been relative anonymity. As a non-condition specific charity, people are often not aware of the therapy, recreation and respite services offered. MontroseAccess supports children with physical disabilities, typically the result of neuromuscular conditions such as duchenne muscular dystrophy.

In fact MontroseAccess cares for more children with this condition than any other organisation in the country. This has led to the development of some unique and world first programs such as Shark Bait Kids – a scuba diving hydrotherapy program where the children dive with sharks!

Darrel went on to say: "On average, one in 22 Queensland children has some kind of physical disability. Since our inception in 1933, we have helped thousands of those children. Many of them have gone on to achieve great things too. For example, former paralympian swimmer Karni Lidell is an ex-client of ours, and so was weightlifter and hand cyclist extraordinaire George Kambouris. Interestingly, many of our clients continue to come back to us and make use of our respite facility at Corinda."

MontroseAccess has more than 600 clients statewide, serviced from one main site at Corinda and three regional offices. These are centres from which therapy staff offer outreach services to the farthest corners of the state. These services include physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social work and speech pathology. And it's not only the children who receive the benefits, staff take a family centred approach, meaning they work with the entire family unit, and not just the children.

Disability care for kids

Address 54 Consort St Corinda Qld 4075 • Postal PO Box 50 Corinda Qld 4075 • Ph 07 3379 9200 • Fax 07 3717 1146

Email info@montroseaccess.org.au • Web www.montroseaccess.org.au

ABN 59 009 661 705

PATRON – Her Excellency the Governor of Queensland Ms Penelope Wensley, AD

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“We’ve been supporting families and contributing to communities for more than 75 years, but it is very difficult. We have an operating deficit of \$1.4-million every year, which we need to fundraise. It costs us on average \$10,000 per client per year to run our programs. We’re hoping this history book will help educate people of our existence and perhaps make that funding challenge a little easier,” said Darrel.

MontroseAccess’ history book will be launched on Wednesday March 16th at Government House, 168 Fernberg Road, Paddington by Her Excellency, Ms Penelope Wensley AC, who is the charity’s Patron. The launch starts at 5pm sharp and media are invited to attend. There will be a private reception following the launch for guests with invites from Government House only.

Media are welcome to record speeches and interview MontroseAccess staff, but the Governor is not available for interviews.

For further information, to arrange an interview or high res images, please feel free to contact MontroseAccess’ Communications Manager, Adam Harper, on (07) 3717 1184 or 0404 871 360 or email: aharper@montroseaccess.org.au

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