



PLC
PRESBYTERIAN
LADIES' COLLEGE
SYDNEY
— 1888 —

STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES:

Dorcas – a PLC Tradition

The idea of helping others is part of the DNA of PLC Sydney. Indeed, reference is made to making garments for the poor in the second issue of the *Aurora Australis* in March 1894, and, as it is written in the past tense, we can deduce that the practice was not new even then.

In December 1894 we read in the *Aurora Australis* that the Dorcas Society will be sending “a parcel of clothing to the Ashfield Infants’ Home this Christmas, consisting of two dozen little frocks and various other garments.”

Our association with Dorcas continues today. But what do we mean when we speak of “Dorcas” and “Dorcas Society”? It is written in Acts 9:36, “In Joppa [Tel-Aviv, Israel today] there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor.” Dorcas’ charitable acts inspired the creation of the Dorcas Society on the Isle of Man in 1834. Today there are Dorcas societies all around the world, including those that are part of the Presbyterian Church, with the shared mission of providing clothing to the poor.



Knitting for Dorcas, mid-1950s



Preparing Dorcas display in College Hall, 1986

At PLC Sydney knitting, sewing or purchasing items of clothing to help those in need has continued, through recession, Depression, two world wars, the GFC of 2007-2009 and the pandemic of 2020-2021. Today we use the term “service learning” to describe how our pupils learn about the needs of the community and get involved through fundraising and other initiatives. Service learning is integral to the Christian faith of the College.

Each year every student from Year 3 to Year 12 participates in Dorcas. Each girl provides or purchases an item of clothing and girls from Year 4 to Year 11 knit a certain number of “diamonds” which are then used to construct class or Tutor Group rugs. The items of clothing and rugs are usually displayed on Open Day and then distributed by the Dorcas Committee through Presbyterian Social Services.



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Dorcas display, Macindoe Library, 2004



Year 6 with their Dorcas Rug, 2012

Knitting the “Dorcas diamonds” can be a challenge for some, for others it provides the opportunity to spend time with mum or grandma and learn a new skill, while for others, it must be admitted, the term “out-sourcing” may be applied. Whatever the method, the act of helping someone else is embraced.

As the deadline for the diamonds approaches, stress levels may be on the increase and a bit of humour may save the day. In 1951 this young knitter was inspired to pen a poem, happy to admit that she gets it “in a mess” and must “Start again!”

THE DORCAS GIFT

Tens in needles and some wool
Filled my knitting bag quite full.
Then I started casting on,
“Oh,” I said, “This won’t be long.
Purl one stitch and then knit twenty—
Cast off two—I’ve still got twenty!”
Pull it out and start afresh,
Still I get it in a mess!
Start again! Start again!
Now I think I’ll knit it plain.

MARGOT WOODWARD, IIIb 2.