



## SPECIAL EDUCATION AVAILABLE FOR RURAL DEAF KIDS

7 DECEMBER 2009

Rural children who are Deaf and communicate using sign language are being offered a fully subsidised place at a specialist school in Sydney through the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children's Host Carer Program.

The educational program allows children from regional areas across Australia to enrol at the RIDBC Thomas Pattison School in Sydney – a school for students from Kindergarten to Year 10 who are Deaf and use Australian Sign Language (Auslan) as their first or preferred language.

The RIDBC Thomas Pattison School is the only school of its kind in NSW. Its specialist program follows the NSW Board of Studies Curriculum but places greater emphasis on developing students' language and literacy skills.

"These are two areas which are the biggest challenge for children who are Deaf," says Jan North, Manager of Children's Services at the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC).

"Many rural students who are deaf lack access to specialised learning environment, like the RIDBC Thomas Pattison School, due to their location.

"The RIDBC Host Carer Program enables these students not only to acquire academic skills, but also to develop confidence, self esteem and self identity through interaction with both Deaf and hearing communities."

During the school term, the children are cared for by host families specially selected by the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children.

Host carer families are proficient in Auslan and live close to the school.

Eleven-year-old Tom Condon from Oxley in ACT has been enrolled on the RIDBC Host Career program and has attended the RIDBC Thomas Pattison School since July 2008.

Throughout school terms, Tom lives with Kathy and Andrew Butler, who are both deaf, and their three children.



Tom Condon, a student on the RIDBC Host Carer Program, learns with Julie Kirkness, Principal of the RIDBC Thomas Pattison School. (Photography by David Jenkins)

“Since starting on the program, we’ve seen quite a few changes in Tom. He is now more confident, better able to communicate with others using Auslan, and is more interested in reading,” said Kevin Condon, Tom’s primary carer.

“We are very grateful to Kathy and Andrew for welcoming Tom to their extended family and community. We also appreciate all the assistance Tom has received from the staff at Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children.”

The RIDBC Host Carer program is available to students who are profoundly deaf, aged between 11 and 18, and who live outside the Greater Sydney Metropolitan area.

For more information please contact RIDBC Host Family Program Coordinator, Robert Nock, on (02) 9872 0885.

*The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) provides regular support to nearly 900 children with hearing or vision impairment and their families across Australia each year. It also provides hearing and vision screening to thousands more.*

*The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children relies heavily on the support of the community to be able to continue to make a difference in children’s lives. In 2010, the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children will celebrate its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.*

**For media enquires, please contact Alissa Crawford, RIDBC Public Relations Officer, on (02) 9872 0304 or 0409 409 962 or [alissa.crawford@ridbc.org.au](mailto:alissa.crawford@ridbc.org.au).**

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