

Media release

Date: 13 October 2005

HRH Crown Princess Mary becomes International Patron of the Alannah & Madeline Foundation

The Alannah and Madeline Foundation announced today that Her Royal Highness, Crown Princess Mary of Denmark had accepted an invitation to become its International Patron.

In making the announcement, the Foundation said Crown Princess Mary was pleased to accept the invitation in light of the Foundation's work in helping children who were victims of sudden family loss and violent crime, as well as with its campaign to eradicate bullying amongst young people.

"I am delighted to accept the position of International Patron of the Foundation and will strongly support its work and endeavours," she said.

"The Foundation was established in response to the Port Arthur tragedy that occurred in Tasmania, the place of my own childhood. I am encouraged by the strength and devotion of those that worked hard to ensure that 'good' could rise out of tragedy. The invaluable work of the Foundation clearly illustrates that this is possible.

"Children have the right to feel safe in our schools and our community. The work of the Foundation in helping young children who are victims of violence, or bullying is a fine example of helping to realise a better society for everyone."

Crown Princess Mary said bullying was "a cruel and senseless act" which could lead to life-long personal problems for many of its victims, their families, as well as the perpetrators. "It has no place in society and every endeavour should be made to remove it from social behaviour."

The Chairman of the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, John Bertrand, today was "extremely pleased and grateful" of Crown Princess Mary's acceptance of patronage.

The Crown Princess of Denmark will join the Prime Minister, John Howard, who is National Patron and the Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks, as the State Patron.

"Her support and presence will enhance our endeavours to build the Foundation and expand its work," said Mr. Bertrand.

"A child is reported abused, or neglected every two minutes in Australia and one in six children are being bullied in the school playground every week.

"This should not be tolerated and we hope our programs will contribute to overcoming these alarming figures.

"It is a national tragedy that bullying still exists in schools today and the Foundation's Better Buddies program is one of the nation's first national initiatives to help overcome this insidious social problem.

“Bullying affects not only the student, but his or her family. It has an effect on the whole community,” he said.

Mr. Bertrand went on to say that everyone at the Foundation looked forward to working together with Crown Princess Mary and to her involvement in their work.

Further information:

Andrew Chappell, CEO The Alannah & Madeline Foundation. Tel: 03 9830 2577.

Background:

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation provides support for children who are victims of violent crime or sudden family loss, through its Children Ahead Program, as well as runs an anti-bullying initiative for schools, called the Better Buddies Program, in conjunction with the Federal Government’s National Safe School Framework (NSSF).

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation was established on April 30, 1997 - two days after the anniversary of the Port Arthur tragedy where 33 adults and 2 children lost their lives. Those two children were Alannah and Madeline Mikac and it is for them the Foundation was named. The girls’ father, Walter Mikac, Phil West and a small group of volunteers, worked hard to set up the Foundation, which was launched by the Prime Minister who also agreed to become its Patron. In his book, To Have and To Hold, Walter Mikac describes the Foundation's origins when writing about the launch:

"When it's my turn to address the crowd, I tell them that the idea for the Foundation came from another Melbourne father, Phil West, who just like me had two daughters. He had been looking at their drawings on the fridge when he thought of the idea of setting up a foundation to help ease the suffering of all these children.... To me this illustrated how an ordinary person can make a difference and it is an ability that is in every one of us..."