

'Glenny Alumni Program' Spotlight – Marnie Kerridge

Understanding how to have your voice not only heard, but more importantly listened to, when your world has reduced sound!

Marnie Kerridge (*nee Francis*) began her secondary education at *Glen Waverley High School* in 1986. She graduated VCE in 1991 from *Glen Waverley Secondary College*, which formed through the amalgamation of *Syndal High School*, *Lawrence Secondary College* (aka. *Syndal Technical School*) and *Glen Waverley High School*. It was indeed a tumultuous time in the history of these three local schools, as the 'District Provision' program tied funding to enrolment numbers and forced nearby schools to compete with one another to attract and enrol students in order to survive. This resulted in many smaller schools closing with quality teachers moving out of education to pursue careers in other fields. These changes led to a reduction in specialised support for students, particularly those with varying abilities and different learning needs. One could say the writing was on the wall for our education system at this time, particularly for students like Marnie who experienced many hurdles throughout her secondary schooling due to a profound hearing loss.

Disability 'support', 'discrimination', 'accommodations' and 'inclusion' were not major buzzwords in the education system when Marnie battled through Years 7-10 silently on her own during the late 80's. Unfortunately, there was no in-class support for her deafness available at *Glen Waverley High School* during this period, apart from that provided to her from kind class mates, progressive teachers (including *Mrs Lena Tan*) and also her sister *Nicole* who was in the same year level as Marnie at school. They would all check in regularly with Marnie during lessons to see if, and what, she understood. Marnie was fortunate to be able to lip-read quite well, but often missed key information or important instructions that were delivered verbally by her teachers, particularly when they were simultaneously writing on the board or facing away from her in class. She recalls almost failing a *Graphic Design* class in Year 9 as her teacher mostly talked to the class about their set task instructions, which Marnie neither heard or completed on a number of occasions. As a result of these experiences, Marnie gradually realised that she had to advocate for herself at high school to ensure that all of her teachers provided her with more accessible learning materials, instructions, support and opportunities to display her understanding.

With the encouragement of her family, Marnie was able to convince the school that she required further support in her VCE studies. She remembers *Mrs Grania Lohning* being appointed as the *Learning Co-Ordinator for Students with Disabilities*, a role in which she worked very hard to ensure that all students were included and properly supported. This was a real turning point for Marnie, as the school organised support staff to take notes on her behalf in most of her classes throughout Year 11, then in all of her Year 12 classes the following year. Marnie's mother even volunteered to take notes for Marnie in one of her VCE subjects due to a lack of available staff to support her in these classes. However, once Marnie started



receiving more support from the school, she soon realised how much harder she needed to work in order to keep up with her classmates and also understand the concepts they were exploring. It also became more apparent to both Marnie and her teachers that the set curriculum, limited resources available for students with disabilities and rigid assessment practices of the time were not conducive to developing, supporting or assessing the specific learning of a student who was deaf. Marnie was well aware of the types of learning and assessment tasks she could not fully access or complete to the best of her abilities, due to her profound deafness. There were also many activities and opportunities, both inside and outside of the classroom, that Marnie missed out on at school due to being overlooked as a result of her deafness. These types of discrimination, both direct and indirect, had a lasting impact on Marnie and set her up to become a stronger and more courageous advocate for all members of the deaf community in the future.

In spite of this Marnie was determined to involve herself in a wide range of extracurricular activities whilst at school, which enabled her to form some long lasting friendships with fellow students who shared similar passions. She initially signed-up for the volleyball program in Year 7, as she thought it was a sport where team mates could communicate with one another relatively easily through non-verbal means. Under the coaching of *Mr Jim Ross*, Marnie thoroughly enjoyed the technical aspects of learning how to serve, dig, set and spike properly. She also developed an awareness of how to effectively move between formations on court when transitioning between defence and attack, all the time relying on her highly tuned visual and kinaesthetic abilities in lieu of her hearing when communicating and working with team mates. Marnie felt a freedom on court whilst playing volleyball every year throughout high school, as she was able to let her playing abilities and skills do all the talking for her. A massive highlight for Marnie occurred when she and her Glenny volleyball team qualified for the Victorian Championships and came up against a highly fancied Fairfield High School in the grand final at the state titles. Marnie can still clearly remember how close this contest was, up until the point at which she stepped behind the baseline to serve in the deciding set. Using an unconventional side-arm service action, which at the time she felt others in her team deemed not as cool as their overhand serve, Marnie won eight straight points with sizzling serves that could not be returned by the opposition. At the end of the match, Marnie was swamped with congratulations from her team mates as together they had just won the State Volleyball Championship!

Marnie also participated in one school production, *'Grease – The Musical'*, which she thoroughly enjoyed performing in. Although she was allowed to be part of the chorus line for this show, she was not considered for any of the major parts in the production as no adjustments or accommodations were put in place at that time to provide Marnie with an opportunity to audition for such roles. Although disappointed, Marnie's stint in the chorus line at school gave her a brief taste of amateur theatre, which she would return to thirty years later. The same can't be said for camping, as one of Marnie's experiences at Nayook during her formative years at Glenny may have slightly soured her love for stays in the great outdoors. Looking back, Marnie can see the funny side of having to use a mini 'DIY' (*Dig It Yourself*) drop toilet at camp, with only a small spade and one roll of toilet paper provided to each student to take care of their own business. A numbered whistle was also given to each student for safety and tracking purposes, in the unlikely event they were separated from their classmates or experienced any difficulties whilst using the open air '*facilities*'. On the second night of camp Marnie accidentally lost her whistle whilst answering the call of nature in the woods, fearing she may have dropped it in her temporary toilet. She was certainly not prepared to dig around in the dark, knowing that it was potentially planted in '*soiled*' soil. So, Marnie moved on and acted as if she still had her whistle on her up until the final day of camp when all of the lost property was rolled out and announced to the campers. One of her teachers took great delight in not only proclaiming that they had found Marnie's whistle, but also detailing from where it had been retrieved, as the coloured lanyard attached to her whistle was spied sticking out from a fresh 'DIY' dunny! Red faced, Marnie quickly retrieved the whistle from the teacher in front of her peers, then quickly found the nearest bin to dispose of it swiftly.....Needless to say, it was a long bus ride home from camp for Marnie that year!

Although Marnie can't pinpoint any specific programs or subjects at high school that directly assisted her to gain employment, she does believe that her experiences at Glen Waverley Secondary College greatly influenced her capacity to develop skills, habits and knowledge that she has utilised in multiple ways throughout all facets of her life. When asked to nominate her favourite VCE subjects, Marnie reminisced about her English Literature and History classes. She went on to discuss that both of these courses demonstrated to her the importance of becoming more disciplined, organised and able to complete work in a timely manner. To her surprise, Marnie was awarded the Dux of Humanities at the conclusion of her Year 12 studies in recognition of her outstanding academic endeavours across a number of VCE subjects. Feelings of self-doubt and a disconnect from her cohort had previously kept Marnie from openly sharing or comparing her work and results with fellow students, hence why she did not actually realise how well she was travelling in VCE. Later that year Marnie was nominated for a Victorian Premier's Award for her achievements in VCE, which she received shortly after graduating from Glen Waverley Secondary College. Her final year of high school proved to be a huge morale boost for Marnie, as it demonstrated to her that she was both clever enough and capable of succeeding in what she calls the '*hearing*' world. Schools such as ours really are a true microcosm of society, something that Marnie is also very grateful for to this day as she was able to develop a wide-range of thinking, social and interpersonal skills at Glenny that would serve her well in years to come. She also feels that she was encouraged to analyse her own identity and reflect upon what she needed to do in order to become a more well-rounded person whilst at GWSC. However, after graduating from Year 12 Marnie was very open with her family and friends about her feelings of not being fulfilled personally during her secondary education. She always felt that her niche would not be found in the '*hearing*' world, as her life was more strongly influenced by her experiences and feelings as a deaf person. This would eventually enable Marnie to explore who she really wanted to be, by immersing herself in the deaf community.

Marnie's love of History and English Literature led her to enrolling in a Bachelor of Arts at The University of Melbourne in 1992. She was blissfully unaware of what career pathway she wanted to pursue from this degree as Marnie did not yet know what truly inspired her. It made sense to Marnie to therefore keep developing her knowledge and skills within areas that she enjoyed studying, allowing herself sufficient time to navigate university and life during her tentative tertiary years in the hope of finding her calling. She then decided to volunteer with a Deaf Youth Group and also engage in voluntary work experience at schools in her local area, working closely with a range of deaf students and teachers. A spark had been lit and Marnie soon discovered her passion for education, with a focus on supporting the deaf community. After completing her Bachelor of Arts in 1994, Marnie enrolled in an accelerated Diploma of Education (Secondary) at La Trobe University which she graduated from in 1995. She then completed further studies in special education and teaching, graduating from The University of Melbourne with a Post Graduate Diploma in Special Education (Hearing Impaired) in 1997. She also completed a degree in Languages Other Than English at La Trobe University in 2008, graduating with a Bachelor of Education LOTE (Auslan).

Over the past twenty-five years Marnie has worked as a classroom teacher, supporting both deaf students and those with related hearing loss, in a number of primary and secondary school settings across Adelaide, Alice Springs, Ballarat and Melbourne. She has also taught VCE Auslan for many years, with her pupils consistently amongst the top performing VCE Auslan students in the state. Marnie has been an educator at the prestigious Victorian College for the Deaf (VCD) since 2014 and one of their Leading Teachers, specialising in coaching teaching and learning, for the past four years. The VCD is Australia's only Prep to Year 12 school that specialises in Deaf Education. They utilise a bilingual philosophy of teaching and learning through Auslan, the language of the Australian deaf community, and English as the second language of their students. Leading a significant pedagogical change at the VCD has been a great source of pride for Marnie, as it has resulted in consistent student learning growth through improved teaching and assessment practices developed and utilised under her leadership.

Outside of the classroom, Marnie has also been actively involved in a range of extracurricular activities she personally enjoys that also bring the deaf community closer together. Her love of volleyball at school provided Marnie with essential skills and the confidence to try out a range of different sports later in life. She plays cricket for the Melbourne Deaf Cricket Club and is an integral member of the Victorian Women's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Cricket team. Marnie was also heavily involved in the administration of this sport through Cricket Victoria, in her former role as president of the Melbourne Deaf Cricket Club. She has also competed in Deaf Netball and Deaf Volleyball, representing Victoria in both pursuits at the Australian Deaf Games. Additionally, Marnie is a life member of Deaf Netball Australia and was previously an active member of many other sporting committees, including Deaf Sports Australia and Deaf Netball Victoria.

An opportunity to be part of the cast for a 'Deaf/Auslan-signed' production in 2017 encouraged Marnie to step back on stage and rekindle her love of theatre. After performing in sell-out shows with glowing reviews for the *'Defferent Theatre'* company, Marnie was nominated for a Green Room Award as *Best Actor in an Independent Theatre Production*. She has since continued to express her love of music and sign-singing through performances with *'The Newmarket Collective'* and as part of the *Melbourne Fringe Festival*. Marnie has also worked as a Language and Cultural Consultant for *'Auslan Stage Left'*, unpacking and reworking musicals so they can be accompanied by Auslan interpreters to provide an immersive, engaging and accessible arts experience for persons with hearing loss. Her talents and expertise in this space have been recognised through her work on major theatre productions including *Hamilton*, *Les Miserables* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In her role as a *'This Girl Can'* ambassador, Marnie actively encourages more young girls and women within the deaf community to get involved in regular physical activities, including a variety of accessible sporting, dramatic and artistic pursuits. Marnie has also presented numerous lectures and keynote addresses about her work in the classroom, in various sporting domains and also as a member of *Deaf Victoria*, advocating for deaf and hard of hearing people to be afforded opportunities to experience equality, connection and recognition of their unique contributions to our diverse society.

Marnie is often asked how non-specialised schools could be more inclusive and better support students with hearing loss. She feels that *'voice to text'* captioning or qualified Auslan interpreters in every class are a must to assist the learning and development of deaf students. Access to captioned digital resources including images, diagrams, videos and slide presentations are also essential in assisting students with hearing loss according to Marnie. She also stresses the importance of developing and utilising assessment procedures, practices and products that are flexible and provide multiple avenues for deaf students to display their understanding. Additionally, Marnie feels that it is imperative that all students who are deaf have opportunities to work alongside fellow deaf students and also be mentored by deaf teachers, to enhance both their sense of belonging and knowledge of the support services available to them at school and in their future careers. Although Marnie was not afforded this level of support during her schooling, she is a strong advocate for improving special education practices and breaking through accessibility barriers for both the deaf community and others living with disabilities.

Looking back over her journey thus far, Marnie wanted to pass on some sage advice to our college community.... Firstly, she wants us all to *"realise that your time at high school is temporary and only a small part of your life, so try to enjoy it while it lasts and don't feel that it is the sole determinant of your future pathways or outcomes"* Finally, Marnie would like to urge everyone to *"view and treat all people who live with a disability fairly and with respect whilst recognising that their disability is not an issue, rather an opportunity for enhanced understandings and relationships to be developed"*

Glen Waverley Secondary College are very proud to formally induct Mrs Marnie Kerridge into our 'Glenny Alumni Program'. Our college community is very fortunate to have such an empathetic, dedicated and inspiring person as a member of our 'GAP', who is willing to stand up and be a voice for those in the community who experience difficulties either being heard or listened to. We look forward to welcoming

Marnie back to GWSC in the near future to share her story and strategies of support with more students and staff, to help develop a more inclusive and respectful society for us all.

