**Ten-year-old social justice entrepreneur wins Anti-Poverty Week ACT schools writing competition**

Ten year old Reshmi Senanayake is one of two well deserving overall winners of *Pens Against Poverty* writing competition, an initiative begun in 2015 giving school students the opportunity during Anti-Poverty Week (16-22 October) to write for a cause, use their imagination, and express their thoughts about social issues. But for the Year 4 student from Canberra Girls Grammar school, Anti-Poverty Week is not just this week, it’s every week.

Reshmi, who is hearing impaired, recently published a book about a hearing impaired child. Proceeds from the book were donated to pay for hearing aids for children in Sri Lanka. Earlier this year Reshmi also donated her hair to the Princess Charlotte Alopecia Program to provide wigs to children with hair loss. Her sister did so last year.

“Reshmi was born in Canberra and her sister was born in Sydney, but our family are from Sri Lanka,” says Reshmi’s father, Sanjaya.  “My wife and I encourage our daughters to remember how lucky they are to live here, and to look for ways to use their gifts and abilities to help others. We’re so delighted to see Reshmi combine her talents and passion in a competition like *Pens Against Poverty.”*

Reshmi won the junior category of the *Pens Against Poverty* competition with her entries titled *The Journey of Slavery*, *Plane Fair* and *At the Fair*. Competition judge and children’s author Jackie French said Reshmi’s work “Her work shows deep empathy, compassion and superb expression, quite extraordinary for her age.”

The competition theme was “Playing Fair” and hundreds of submissions were received from school students from grades 3 to 10 across Canberra, with creative entries ranging from poems to short stories.

“We’re so pleased to see that nearly 30 Canberra schools chose to be involved representing the Public, Catholic and Independent sectors,” says Jeremy Halcrow, Anglicare CEO and Co-Chair of Anti-Poverty Week ACT. “With teachers and parents supporting children and young people during the competition, it sparks conversations about helping others in need, which is the purpose of Anti-Poverty Week. There is great power in seeing the next generation develop knowledge and compassion around issues of social justice and inclusion.”

The overall winner of the senior category was 16 year old Evonne Johnston from St Francis Xavier College with her entry titled *Popcorn chicken, the currawong and I*.

Jackie French was impressed with the general quality of the submissions. “To write well about poverty means that for a short while you try to become the people that you write about. Giving with our hands, our hearts, and our pens, knits the fabric of our society together in a way that only giving money never can,” says Jackie. “Australia's national character is made up of our attitudes as well as actions. The entrants in this competition have given a gift to all of us. They have made our nation just a little better. Tomorrow, and in years to come, I suspect they will do far, far more.”

The overall winners in the schools categories were Harrison School, St Bede’s Primary School and Canberra Girls Grammar School.

The competition was the initiative of a local Canberra teacher and supported by a range of Canberra-based community sector organisations including Anglicare ACT, Marymead, YWCA Canberra, St Vincent de Paul, ACTCOSS and Oz Harvest. Major prizes were sponsored by Arthur J Gallagher and HESTA.

**EVENT - Pens Against Poverty Awards Ceremony**

**When:** Friday 21 October at 10:30am

**Location:** Canberra College Performing Arts Centre, 2 Launceston St, Phillip