

BtN: Episode 29 Transcript 20/10/15

Coming up on Behind the News.

- As bushfire season ramps up we find out why some cadets are preparing to fight fire with fire.
- Meet the boy campaigning for sick kids to be included at school even when they're away!
- And singing opera in the outback.

Hi I'm Nathan and welcome to BtN! You can see all those stories later but first.

Kids in Detention

Reporter: Carl Smith

INTRO: Did you know that about 200 kids are currently being held by the Australian Government in immigration detention centres? Some are held in Australia, others on an island a long way from here called Nauru. But lately there's been growing concern for their welfare. A group of doctors from the Royal Children's Hospital in Victoria recently announced that they're now refusing to return kids sent to them for treatment from an immigration detention centre. But why? Here's Carl.

These guys are writing letters to their pen pals.

MICHAELA: I like to cook, and when I grow older, I want to be an actor in movies.

HARPER: My favourite singer's Drake, and my least favourite singer's Taylor Swift.

MICHAELA: The drawing below is from my favourite TV show Adventure Time.

But these kids at a primary school in Melbourne haven't actually met their pen pals. They don't even know their names.

SARAH & MICHAELA: Hi BtN, I'm Sarah, and I'm Michaela. We've been writing letters to children in Nauru!

These guys have been learning about refugees and asylum seekers in class. And they heard that some of the asylum seeker kids being held on Nauru, a tiny island in the Pacific, weren't very happy. So they joined a new program trying to help.

MICHAELA: Lots of schools all around Australia create letters, and then the Befriend a Child in Detention program mails them off with a book to the Nauru Detention Centre.

That's one of the places where the Australian Government sends asylum seekers who have tried to come to Australia. More than 600 asylum seekers are currently being held on Nauru and that includes about 90 kids. The government says it's safe for them to be there. But many aid organisations disagree, and back in Australia there have been some big protests from people like these doctors who are worried about the physical and mental health of kids kept inside detention centres.

DR TOM CONNELL, MELBOURNE'S ROYAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL: Children from detention develop anxiety and depression. It's become so common, that it's almost normal in detention for children to have these symptoms

And communication with the outside world can be pretty tricky. That's why getting a single letter can make such a big difference for them.

HARPER: Hello my name is Harper and I am 12 years old.

SUNNY: I love music, in my spare time I'm always listening to my favourite singer Ed Sheeran.

SARAH: I think the program is kind of about giving the kids and adults the kind of chance to experience what it's like to be in Australia, as we're writing about our life, they would probably feel remembered as well.

So far the program has been pretty successful! And the books they send have also been really handy for the kids on Nauru!

MICHAELA: Many of the children in the detention centre are learning English, and so it's good for them to practice their English with books.

SARAH & MICHAELA: The children love receiving our letters, and some of them even wrote back!

KID: So this is a painting I got from Christina in Nauru, it says 'Christina thanks you'. So yeah, it's really nice!

KID: Hi my name is Hiba and I love to cook. My favourite sport is tennis and soccer. Thank you for the book, I hope we meet each other.

ELLA: They cried tears of joy when they figured out there were letters inside of the books.

Some of the kids here have had lots of replies and hope they can even meet the kids on Nauru one day.

KID: Dear Kithu, hi again, I'm just writing to you to give you an update and say hello. Your reply was the best thing that ever happened to me. Thank you very much. My birthday's coming up. You are a really good pen pal.

MICHAELA: I want them to know that they're not alone, and that there are people out there that care for them.

SUNNY: I hope that you enjoy this letter and I hope that you reply, lots of love, I mean lots of smiles, from Sunny.

The Wire

A really big storm has hit the Philippines. It's caused a lot of damage and at least one person has died. More than twenty-three thousand people have had to leave their homes. Rescue teams are trying to help those who have become trapped by rising floodwaters.

A recent poll has shown that Malcolm Turnbull is super popular with Australians. He's more popular than previous Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten. The opinion poll shows that if there was an election right now 53% of people would choose the LNP and 47% would pick the Labor Party.

The Government's new metadata retention scheme started last week which means information about our phone calls, emails, and text messages will now all be stored. It doesn't include our actual phone conversations but it does include things like who you spoke to, what time you spoke to them, and how long for.

You've probably seen lots of these health labels on snacks from the school canteen. But consumer group Choice says a lot of these products aren't necessarily that healthy and that the labels can be misleading. The group says it now wants to get rid of at least 17 different types of labels to make it easier for everyone to pick the right food.

And finally a koala has decided it would rather climb something other than trees at a Wildlife park in NSW. 'Imogen' was being released into her new enclosure for the first time when she approached the cameraman filming her. Turns out she wasn't keen on becoming a star - she just thought he looked like a tree!

Fire Preparations

Reporter: Carl Smith

INTRO: Fire season has only just begun but already bushfires in Victoria and South Australia have destroyed property and forced people to evacuate. This season is predicted to be one of the worst for many years. So what can emergency services do to lessen the risk? To find out Carl tagged along with a group of fire fighting cadets as they learnt how to fight fire with fire.

These cadet fire-fighters are getting ready to do something that might seem a little strange. They're preparing to light a fire.

ASHLEY: Yeah it is a bit strange, but we know what's happening and we know what to do. It is obviously dangerous if we have those things on the ground, and we try and make it as safe as we can.

VICTORIA: We have to burn this off, because this is the stuff that catches alight. This is making it easier for when a real fire occurs.

TOM, CADET COORDINATOR: All right guys, we've got to get this burn underway, can you guys at the back there just start picking up the leaf litter and some of the fallen branches.

All of this stuff they're collecting is really flammable and if a bushfire swept through it would help make the fire even bigger. So one part of a fire-fighter's job is to burn it all under safe, controlled conditions before a big, wild bushfire can get to it. That's called a Burn Off.

AIDEN: Burn-offs prevent other bushfires. So we have this triangle of fire. The triangle includes heat, fuel and oxygen. That's the main things that make a fire. And if you take one piece away, the triangle collapses, and you wouldn't be able to have a fire. So with a burn off we take away the fuel, which would destroy the triangle and stop the fire.

Burn-offs are planned and monitored by fire-fighters. They're often coordinated in control rooms like this, with fire-fighters keeping an eye on them from the ground and from the air. But fire is very dangerous and often unpredictable.

TOM, CADET COORDINATOR: Oh righto, yep no dramas.

So today the crew had to cancel their burn-off just to be safe.

TOM, CADET COORDINATOR: I've just had a phone call, there's some fire bans predicted for tomorrow. There's some hot weather and dry winds coming through, they've had to cancel our burn-off and they'd like us to postpone it.

VICTORIA: We were planning to do a burn-off, and yeah - it's too hot today!

AIDEN: It was cancelled because that caused too much risk of a big fire.

And these guys know that a big fire can do a massive amounts of damage.

NEWS REPORTER: Behind me you can see that the fire's really taken hold, it's jumped over the ridge.

Earlier this month in South Australia and Victoria controlled burn-offs jumped containment lines and spread over hundreds of hectares. Two houses were even lost. That's why these cadets are learning about the best ways to plan and contain burn offs. So hopefully nothing goes wrong!

ASHLEY: Yeah we try and set it up in an open space but we try to contain it as well

AIDEN: So what we do is we create a wall around the fire, kind of with other twigs, and we make sure that everyone's prepared.

VICTORIA: Make sure it's not near a house, and get rid of anything that could catch alight, and just make sure that we're always in protective for our safety, and for everyone else's safety keep people away.

And although only fire-fighters are allowed to do burn offs, these guys have some other tips to help get your home or school fire-safe too.

ROBYN: Basically it's just cleaning up around your house, trying to prevent or stop a bushfire from coming too close to your house.

AIDEN: They could help their parents clean the gutters, make sure there are no dry sources around.

ASHLEY: They can clean up their backyard, make sure everything's clean near the home and get fire ready.

Quiz 1

Okay let's stay with the subject of fire for our first quiz. Good luck!

Which gas does fire need to burn? Is it:

- Oxygen
- Carbon dioxide
- Nitrogen

The answer is Oxygen.

School Sickness

Reporter: Eloise Fuss

INTRO: Next up a new report's found around 60,000 schoolkids miss substantial amounts of school each year because of long-term illness. It's a problem that only makes their treatment harder because these kids are often left feeling lonely and stressed about falling behind. But now one young guy is trying to help. Here's Eloise.

Darcy's 15 and he's a happy, healthy teenager. But not too long ago Darcy was actually really sick and had to miss two years of school.

DARCY: Well normally when a kid misses school because they've got a flu or something they're just like 'oh well it's great, get a few days off, no work'. But when you start missing it for longer periods of time it really hits you.

He had to have a bone marrow transplant. And while he was in hospital, he realised there were a lot of things about school that he really missed.

DARCY: Just being part of the school community, interacting with friends and learning, and just day to day stuff like that.

And Darcy's not alone. A new report estimates around 60,000 kids across Australia are regularly missing school due to a long-term illness. The most common diseases keeping them away are cancer, asthma, diabetes and cystic fibrosis.

But all this time away from school can leave kids seriously behind in their classes. Plus they're forced to miss out on all the fun stuff, like hanging out with friends, going on excursions, and just feeling like they belong. But Darcy and his mum are now fighting for that to change.

They've set up a group called 'Missing School', and they're pushing for new laws that would force schools to include sick kids in all classroom activities, even when they're away. So they never feel like they're missing out, or don't belong. And they think technology, like video calls, could be the key.

MEGAN GILMOUR, DARCY'S MUM: For some kids the school is their hope and that's why we want to see schools really stepping up and giving that support and understanding the experience of kids who miss school.

Darcy: I strongly believe in what my mum is doing, and I've stuck by her from the start and I hope she keeps doing what she's doing because it's really going to help people.

This week, Darcy and his mum took their fight all the way to Parliament House!

Darcy: Many kids are also going through the same struggle as I did four years ago and we need to give them what matters most: to feel better today, to have a good future, to learn, have our friends and be part of our school.

While Darcy's now healthy and back at school, he hopes the work he and his mum are doing, will help other kids like him.

Darcy: I don't want them to be in the same position I was, pretty much just stranded not knowing what to do.

And he says schools will help make life better, for all of those kids just trying to get better themselves.

POLL

Okay so one of the solutions mentioned there was for sick kids to be able to dial into school at any time via a video call. That might work in this situation but could it work for other students too? Should all kids be able to take their classes from home via a video call? Head to our website to place your vote.

Barra School

Reporter: Eloise Fuss

INTRO: Okay next up today. Five-star restaurants and schools don't usually have much in common but on Kangaroo Island, both work hand in hand to produce some very tasty results. Students breed barramundi at school that are then sold on to a restaurant for their award-winning menu. And chefs say it's some of the best fish they can find. Here Eloise with more.

It's a super fancy restaurant serving some five-star food.

WAITER: So here we have the pan-roasted barramundi.

So lots of people wouldn't expect that the fish in this dish is actually produced by kids.

Here at Parndana on South Australia's Kangaroo Island, kids don't just learn in the classroom. It's one of the oldest agricultural schools in Australia and farming's one of their major subjects. So along with reading books they also feed chooks. And they have their very own fish farm.

Inside these tanks they're raising barramundi and it's a really big job! They need to feed them, keep their tanks running and make sure they don't eat each other!

Wait what?

JARRAD: They have a tendency of eating each other when they get to a certain size, so a fish of, say, 60 centimetres will eat something up to two-thirds of its size. So you gotta get the big ones out and move them into the right-sized tank, otherwise you have problems there.

They also use the waste water from the fish farms here in an aquaponics garden. The water's got heaps of nutrients in it so it's great for growing herbs and veggies. And just like the barra farm the kids have helped design it and it's their job to fix it when things go wrong. The kids say they're learning heaps.

"OK girls what's going on here what part of the nitrogen cycle are we testing?"

"We're doing nitrate at the end of the cycle"

Testing and treating the water teaches them chemistry. There's lots of maths in all the measurements they take. And they learn all about the lifecycle of barramundi which is biology.

TANNER: Practical learning - I find that so much easier than assignments. Like, you're doing assignments after but it's easier to learn with practical things 'cause you can actually understand and see, like, what you're doing and it's funner to be out of the classroom than behind a door at a desk.

Back at that fancy Kangaroo Island restaurant a delivery of the school's fish comes in every week. The chef says it's some of the best barra they can find.

JACK INGRAM, CHEF: They're doing an excellent job. The quality is amazing. It's as good a quality as anything I've seen. I mean, we get them one day after processing, so they are as fresh as the freshest fish you'll see. And we really rate the barramundi.

JARRAD: To be able to get fish from a rural school like ours to one of the high-class restaurants/hotel, it's quite impressive. We're very proud of that.

And it's a dish definitely worth an A+.

Quiz 2

Okay sport's up next but first a quick fish quiz.

What are Barramundi called overseas?

- River Groper
- Asian Seabass
- Or Flathead

The answer is Asian Seabass. They confusingly also have a few other names too. Like Giant Perch, Palmer, Bek-ti and Nairfish.

The Score

Right it's sport time now. Here's your highlights.

The Wallabies are through to the semi-finals of the rugby world cup after a narrow victory over Scotland. Although Australia scored five tries to Scotland's three, Greig Laidlaw's boot proved more reliable than Bernard Foley's.

And then this happened with just four minutes to go:

COMMENTATOR: Oh it's been intercepted by Bennet! A front row forward!

But a controversial penalty gave Australia a chance to steal the game back and Foley nailed it.

COMMENTATOR: He's stabbed it down the middle!

Aussie surfer Tyler Wright has taken out the French World Surfing League women's title. The win moved her to number five in the world.

TYLER WRIGHT: I finally realise the difference between someone that doesn't care and someone that cares and I care and it just feels so fulfilled.

And the mayor of London Boris Johnson may have got a little carried away while playing rugby with some kids in Tokyo. He was racing down the pitch and managed to bowl over 10 year old Toki on the way! Luckily Toki wasn't hurt.

And they settled things with a nice handshake.

Opera Kids

Reporter: Carl Smith

INTRO: It's fair to say that opera wouldn't usually be that popular with kids but recently in the outback town of Broken Hill twenty local indigenous kids signed up to learn all about this type of music from two operatic experts. Carl joined them as they were preparing to write a song featuring parts of their traditional language and culture.

This is Broken Hill, a small desert town known mostly for its giant mines. What it's not known for is its love of opera. But that might be about to change. These indigenous kids from four schools across Broken Hill are all taking part in a special opera workshop. They're learning how to sing and perform.

CHEREE: When you're doing opera, it's not all just standing there and singing, it's sort of like a play but every word is sung out.

And they're being trained by some of the best.

DEBORAH: Opera is fun. I've never met a child that didn't just get such a great sense of fun from participating and in singing in that fashion!

Deborah and Jess are professional opera singers from Short Black Opera. They've been travelling through rural and regional Australia on a kind of talent search!

JESS: We bring to them the opportunity to learn opera, or just singing as well, and working as a group, as well as the opportunity to potentially be a part of the Short Black Opera Company.

GEORGIA: We sing with Jess and Deborah and they teach us all the strategies that make us a better singer and all that.

They've also had a lot of fun.

CHEREE: It's amazing, I love it, it's so funny!

Throughout the week, the kids have been working together to come up with their very own song.

JESS: So everywhere we go, we write a song with the children and we give it to them as our gift so that they can sing it when we leave so that there's a story for them to tell there and it's their own story.

Jess and Deborah came up with the music, but the kids wrote all the lyrics.

GEORGIA: We put down ideas and drawings and they put it together, so yeah, and I like it - it's really good.

Some parts of the song are even written in Paakantyi, the local traditional language.

SHAKUR: I've learned about my culture in many ways. Until I came here I knew different words and made new friends.

These guys are proud of their home.

KIDS: 'We love Broken Hill.'

And throughout the workshop they've had a lot of help from the local community. So to say thanks the kids thought it'd be a good idea to show off what they'd learned in front of their friends, their teachers and their families.

CHEREE: I'm nervous about singing our song because I might forget the words or something - hopefully that doesn't happen!

DESTINY: It's been fun and I wish we can keep doing this for the whole entire year.

SHAKUR: We can create new songs and follow your heart.

CHEREE: I feel very proud, because I've learned things that I've never thought that I could do before.

Closer

And that brings us to an end for another week!

But the fun will continue on Friday for #AskaReporter.

This week's topic will be on our Fire Preparations story.

Hope to see you then! Bye!