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Media Release

## ***Cross+Gen Wins Prestigious Award for Outstanding Intergenerational Innovation***

**Wollongong – 24 February 2025** – The Catholic Diocese of Wollongong's Cross+Gen program has been recognised with a prestigious Award for Innovation and Contribution for 2025 from the Australian Institute for Intergenerational Practice (AIIP) at their annual conference on Friday. This award celebrates innovative and impactful intergenerational programs that foster meaningful connections between generations and promote more inclusive, cohesive communities.

A collaborative effort between CatholicCare, Catholic Education, and local Catholic parishes, Cross+Gen brings together older people and high school students in a mutually enriching experience by addressing digital exclusion among seniors while offering students an opportunity for meaningful outreach and community engagement.

Since its pilot in 2021, Cross+Gen has expanded from one school and three parishes to four schools and 15 parishes across the Illawarra, Macarthur, and Shoalhaven regions. The program's flexible, hands-on sessions are hosted in schools, with hospitality students often providing refreshments, further strengthening community ties. Evaluation data highlights significant improvements in seniors' digital confidence, increased social interaction, and the development of empathy and leadership skills among students.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Cross+Gen is what participants have come to call "the hum" - the unmistakable sound of lively conversation, shared learning, and genuine enthusiasm that fills each session from start to finish.

This award underscores the commitment of the Catholic Diocese of Wollongong to fostering initiatives that enable individuals to thrive, build positive relationships, and contribute to a more connected society.

The Award for Innovation and Contribution was presented at the AIIP annual conference, held in Surry Hills on 21-22 February 2025. The conference brought together researchers and practitioners to explore the power of intergenerational connections for thriving communities. More information on the AIIP is available [here](#).

### **Quotes:**

"The Catholic Diocese of Wollongong is deeply honoured to receive this award from the AIIP," said Bishop Brian Mascord, Bishop of Wollongong. "Cross+Gen is a powerful testament to how intergenerational programs can enrich lives and strengthen relationships. It highlights the vital role of our Pastoral Works in serving and uplifting people across all stages of life."

"At the heart of Cross+Gen is the belief that every generation has something valuable to share," said Michael Austin, CEO of CatholicCare. "This program not only enhances digital literacy among older adults but also fosters deep, human connections that combat social isolation for both young and old. We are incredibly proud of the impact Cross+Gen is having in our communities. This award reinforces the importance of intergenerational initiatives and encourages us to continue expanding our reach."

"Catholic schools are called to be beacons of hope in their communities and Cross+Gen is a shining example of the positive impact our students have when they put the values of a Catholic school into action," said Peter Hill, Director of Schools, Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong. "Through the program, students reflect on the example of Jesus as a boundary crosser — serving others and building relationships. In doing so, they develop their leadership skills and character, while making a real difference in the lives of the older people they are privileged to connect with."

Images of Cross+Gen are available to view [here](#).

#### **About Catholic Diocese of Wollongong:**

The Catholic Diocese of Wollongong is a vibrant, diverse community of 191,000 baptised Catholics, led by Bishop Brian Mascord, across the Illawarra, Macarthur, Shoalhaven, and Southern Highlands regions of NSW, Australia. Committed to knowing, loving, and serving Jesus Christ through Baptism and the Holy Spirit, our mission is to foster a communion of parish, school, welfare, and religious communities that equip the faithful to carry out Christ's mission in the world. Established in 1952, the diocese is rooted in the 2,000-year tradition of the Church, handed down through an unbroken line of popes from St Peter to Pope Francis, uniting us as bearers of Christ's love.

#### **About CatholicCare Wollongong:**

CatholicCare is an inclusive social services organisation committed to providing professional services across the lifespan to individuals, families, and communities in need throughout the Diocese of Wollongong. Offering compassionate, high quality community services that promote human dignity, connection, and wellbeing, CatholicCare's passion is supporting people to harness their strengths, thrive in their relationships, and build positive futures.

#### **About Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong:**

Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong is the largest provider of non-government education in the Macarthur, Illawarra, Southern Highlands, and Shoalhaven. It's our mission to create vibrant Catholic school communities where every student finds meaning and purpose in their life through experiencing continual growth in faith and improvement in learning.

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