

'Your Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC, Governor of New South Wales, Mr Wilson, Special Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen and Gold Award Holders...'

- Congratulations to all Gold Award recipients. I remember being in your shoes receiving my Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award in the garden of Government House. I completed the Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards through the Girl Guides. My mother who had already become a guide leader to support me to be a guide, also became a Duke of Edinburgh's Award Coordinator to allow me to participate in the award program. I participated in tennis, squash and hockey for my physical recreation, played the trumpet for my skill, volunteered doing First Aid and with the Rural Fire Service, and completed open expeditions doing hiking and canoeing.
- The Award program was such a fun, challenging, meaningful experience for me. It gave me so much confidence, and was a significant contributor to me getting my first jobs as an accountant. I worked for eleven years as an accountant, and stepped away from many of the experiences that I completed in my award program. But after those eleven years, I felt the need to contribute more to society, and completed my Diploma of Education to become a teacher. One of my first steps was to start the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at Riverside Girls High School, and then also became the Duke of Ed Coordinator at Fort Street High. Then, I had another break from award activities when my children were young, although started a different volunteering activity with a charity for refugees.
- I was really excited to become the Duke of Ed Coordinator again two years ago, when the Principal made the decision to integrate the Duke of Ed program into our school's wellbeing program and encourage the entire year 9 cohort to participate in the Bronze award. It was challenging to coordinate such a large scale program and to bring along all the Fort Street staff, parents and students along the journey with us. Last year, we managed to pick the only week in a drought stricken year when it poured with rain to run our combined Bronze expedition. But our model has become incredibly successful, and this year the enthusiasm for Duke of Ed is electrifying. Last year we had 70 students finish their Bronze awards, but this year I expect the full cohort of 150 year 9 students to complete their Bronze awards. Our Silver contingent has grown to over a third of the grade. And I want to acknowledge Fortian Danny Lai who I am here today to support, who has achieved his Gold Award.
- Everyone who is present today knows why the Duke of Edinburgh's Award program is so amazing, and why the Gold Award is such a huge achievement. It's not about being an elite sportsperson or artist, although that's the goal for some people. It's about participating, committing, turning up, contributing to the team and helping the wider community. I'm so proud of the young people who participate in this program, who have improved their fitness, broadened their mind, challenged their boundaries and made a difference. It's particularly rewarding to see young people who experience extra challenges manage to overcome these to participate. At Fort Street, we've had students with a variety of physical and mental health challenges complete their awards, and it's awe inspiring to see the pride on those students' faces when they reach their goals.
- But a Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award isn't the end of the journey. Like me, many of you have moved onto university and careers and perhaps you have put on hold some or all of the activities that you completed as part of your award program. And that's ok, and in many ways a good thing, as you are taking on significant new challenges in tertiary education and the workforce. But keep in mind the values that you have developed through the Duke of Ed program, and when the time is right, consider the next steps. Perhaps you'll challenge yourself to take up a new hobby or sport, or see an opportunity to make a real difference in your community. And when that time comes, I encourage you to remember the challenges that you overcame when completing your award program, and embrace this new challenge with gusto.
- For me, I feel that the Award program has taken me in a bit of a circle, I got so much out of my Duke of Ed award program, and it's so rewarding to help so many more young people achieve their Duke of Ed award and through them to make a difference to so many community organisations. I took up taekwondo a couple of years ago and am now a blue belt 2. I love playing my trumpet again with my son Nathan who is learning the trombone. And I'm passionate about being in nature doing expeditions with my school, my family and as a scout leader, and connecting with other people with similar values. Life is undoubtedly busy, but such fun and is so meaningful.