

Wedding Bells

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Chris and Andrea are enthusiastically working towards their wedding. They are currently involved in all the usual rigmarole of catering and wedding dresses, but this month they took time out at Catholic Marriage Education Services to prepare for not just the wedding, but a lifetime together in which they will continue to grow in love. They are both very much aware of the need to prepare as thoroughly as possible for the many challenges they will inevitably face together. They know that their relationship and circumstances will undergo the normal and inescapable changes that come as they progress from one stage of life to another.

Chris and Andrea are building a new home; both have good jobs and come from caring and supportive families. They are also both deaf. Chris has a Bone Conduct Implant and has some hearing. Andrea has a Cochlear Implant and is an excellent lip reader. Nevertheless, participating in a meaningful



marriage preparation process presented some challenges. Chris and Andrea decided against joining a group programme and instead chose an inventory style program - FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study) - that allowed them to work alone with a facilitator. The pair is one of the first waves of couples in Australia to use the newly developed Auslan video presentation of the FOCCUS inventory and as such, their feedback concerning its use is of great value to both Catholic Marriage Education Services and the John Pierce Centre in Victoria that developed the video.

The couple says they were nervous about taking part in the course, but found it very useful. "At first, we were apprehensive about attending, but we plucked up courage to go. The course was helpful and gave us an insight of things that will help us in our marriage."

Christina Graves, Director of Catholic Marriage Education Services in Perth, describes the experience of working with Chris and Andrea as 'humbling'. She says, "I have been privileged to work with a number of deaf couples over the past few years and each time has proven to be quite inspirational. Working with Chris and Andrea was no different. The enthusiasm and openness with which they approached the process is amazing. I know that I am personally and professionally far richer for the experience." Christina also says she was blessed during the process to be able to work with Barbara Harris and Fr Paul Pitzen from the Emmanuel Centre. "They were always available as interpreters and to offer guidance."

"I'm not sure I could have coped without them!" She says, "Barbara and Fr Paul are real professionals; both have incredible knowledge and are extremely generous in sharing their expertise. My sentence structure and approach is often quite poor for translation purposes, but this time it wasn't just Barbara and Fr Paul who pulled me up, but Chris and Andrea were on my case immediately. They explained the best way to communicate with them using sentences that were simpler to translate. It was great – they really helped me to learn."