

# The largest red nose in the world

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When I took up my first appointment as principal in 1992 at Richmond High School in Western Sydney, the school had already been supporting the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) charity, particularly since the introduction of the familiar national Red Nose Day in 1988. Fundraising for this worthy charity (now known as SIDS and Kids) was driven by the enthusiasm and hard work of the Student Representative Council (SRC) and their amazing coordinator Mrs Pat Pilgrim.

Over the years, Red Nose Day fundraising activities began to form a very important part of the Richmond High School curriculum and culture. Whilst the initial motivation was to raise much needed funds for such important research, the resulting impacts on curriculum and culture evolved almost as a natural outcome.

Ideas generated by the SRC became bigger ideas. Moderate community support became mammoth community support. The desire to become involved became infectious. Fun had become great fun – and all along, students, staff and the wider school community had been learning a great deal – without perhaps even realising this.

Although the remainder of this story will focus on one major event in 1994, it is interesting to note that the school did not pause and more formally ask “*What have we done and what have we learned?*” until the later part of 1999 – a year in which the school raised over \$35,000 for SIDS. This figure was incredibly surpassed in 2000 when the school raised \$50,000 for the charity.

This evaluation confirmed that ‘*the skills we learned*’ extended far beyond the scope of any syllabus or planned program in our school. Students, through their involvement with Red Nose Day, were developing skills in areas that included:

Teamwork	Organisation	Problem Solving	Technology
Communication	Performing Arts	Self Confidence	Creativity
Dealing with People	Resource Management		

And so, back to 1994 and the SRC’s desire to create ‘the largest red nose in the world’.

A conservative and cautious principal in their third year of leadership might respond to this notion with visions of a big red nose manufactured within the confines of the school’s Industrial Arts building – but that is not the way that young creative minds think! They instead had their eyes and imagination on the school’s unique assembly hall.

The Richmond High School hall had been constructed in 1977. It was a dome in shape and commonly known as a Bini Shell (named after its designer). Our school knew it as the Milton Alston Centre (MAC) – named after a highly regarded teacher of 40 years at the school.



*Red Nose Day 1994 – The School Captain supervises from above*

The student plan was to totally cover the Bini Shell in red plastic sheeting to create the world’s largest red nose! If achieved, this marvellous sight would be admired from the ground and also photographed during a flyover by a Hercules plane (with its nose painted red) from the local Richmond RAAF base and also by any attending media helicopters.

How could the principal not support such a grand plan? Surely, there would be very little disruption to normal school routine? Surely, all staff would be supportive also? Surely, there were no risks? Surely, the Bini would not collapse (some had)? So of course, the principal agreed. (As an aside, I think the only time I ever said NO to any Red Nose Day initiative was when the assistant SRC Coordinator asked permission to parachute out of one of the low-flying Hercules aircraft – naturally using a red parachute. Despite my refusal, I always remained nervous during such flyovers that this particular staff member might come plummeting down to earth – along with my principalship).

How could students, with the support of staff and the school community, achieve such an amazing challenge? There was no checklist (or even consideration) of *'the skills we learned'* as listed above, but every one of them and more came into play.

How much plastic would be needed? Where would we get it? Would it be donated? How big were the sheets? How would we get it up and over a dome-shaped assembly hall with a diameter of 36 metres? How would it be secured? On and on went the questions and one at a time, the SRC came up with the solutions.

The need for around 2,200 square metres of plastic sheeting was confirmed through maths classes. The SRC confirmed a supplier at the right price. The School Captain and a band of willing helpers heat welded lengths of the plastic together – 30 centimetres at a time – and folded the resulting massive sheet into a single manageable bundle. A huge crane was organised and the local State Emergency Service and Police were contacted for support. Sand bags were prepared around the perimeter to hold the sheeting in place. Local primary school students, parents, community members and dignitaries were invited to witness the spectacle.

Then came the day – Red Nose Day 1994. The crane lifted the huge bundle of plastic onto the roof of the Bini Shell assembly hall. Members of the SES were already on the roof and began unfolding the plastic – much to the joy of the 2,000 spectators on the ground. Until – the bundle would unfold no further! They could not do it! It was stuck! The marvellous grand plan which had involved such hard work was stopped in its tracks!

But nothing would get in the way of the SRC and our School Captain in particular. He says "Get me up there and I will fix it. I made it and I know how to do it." All of a sudden, I felt it was me parachuting out of the Hercules! What about risk assessment? What about OHS? What about student welfare? What about the Cluster Director standing beside me looking horrified?

The School Captain was insistent. His parents were insistent. The principal was looking for holes in his parachute. But yes, fully rigged up by the SES, the School Captain was raised by the crane to the top of the Bini Shell and immediately went to work.



*Red Nose Day 1994 – The plastic starts unfolding...*

In no time at all, the plastic began to shower down all sides of the dome and was secured on the ground by the dozens of prepared sand bags.

The SRC and the school community had created the largest red nose in the world!

As great as the student effort was, it was sad that the plastic could not stay on the dome for long. However, the memories of this day remained with the school community right up to (and beyond) 2004 when the team arranged for the Bini Shell to be permanently painted red. The world's largest red nose had returned!

The Bini Shell was due for demolition early in 2019, replaced by a beautiful new Multi-Purpose Centre – just reward for the students and their school community who have continued to support the SIDS and Kids cause. At best guess, the amount now raised by the school for that worthy charity would be approaching \$250,000.



*Red Nose Day 2004 – The Bini Shell is permanently painted red*

### **Contributor details**

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