No stopping golden girls

By Rebecca DiGrolame

Zoe Molloy is one of the fastest rowers at her college. Fellow student Sophie Patton has three gold medals to her name following the State Junior Athletics Championship.

What makes the achievements of these Loreto College students all the more extraordinary is that both girls are vision impaired.

"In the boat, I can see the person in front of me but beyond that I can’t see," says Zoe.

She was born with ocular albinism. "I have 20 per cent vision in both eyes."

Sophie has cortical vision impairment leaving her legally blind. She also has a physical impairment affecting muscle tone, rigidity and balance.

"It doesn’t stop me from doing things," says Sophie of her disabilities. "It just stops me from doing specific things, like ball sports, but I don’t mind because I can do athletics."

And, she can do it well.

Earlier this year Sophie won gold at the South Australian Junior Athletics Championships for the 100m, 200m and long jump events in her classification and age group. Her success on the track saw her compete for South Australia at the Australian Junior Athletics Championship at Olympic Park in Sydney. She made it into the finals for long jump, came seventh in the 200m race and eighth in the 100m race, achieving a personal best time in both races for her age and classification.

Sophie, 16, began training in 2008 with bronze medal paralympian Sam Rickard through Blind Sports South Australia. Her first competition was 12 months ago and she currently belongs to the Western Districts Athletics Club as part of its Impact Athletics Squad.

Zoe, 15, is part of the First Eight Loreto College team. She is the youngest of her peers and took up the sport less than a year ago. In March, Zoe was among the team which earned Loreto an equal third placing in the SA Girls Head of the River competition. She too has a swag of medals to her name, including first place in a four boat for Loreto at the State Championships earlier this year.

The girls’ collective message to students with disabilities is to have faith in the abilities you possess.

"For me, if you have the confidence to go out there and do it, then you should do it," says Sophia. "Just because you have a disability shouldn’t stop anyone. And if people say that you can’t do it, then prove them wrong: you are a unique individual with your own talents."

"Sophie and Zoe really take the ‘I out of can’t,’ " says Kate Frost, the College’s inclusive education coordinator.

"There is a lot to be learned by all from Sophie and Zoe and we at Loreto College are fortunate to have their example daily."

Mrs Frost said Zoe and Sophie have access to specialist support programs and participate in mainstream class, with adaptation where needed.

She said staff members at Loreto College were attentive to the vision impairment needs of students in accessing IT and written material, and generally moving around the school grounds.

Knights increase assistance to growing homeless population

With Adelaide experiencing heavy rain and low temperatures, the city’s growing homeless population is suffering from exposure to bitter conditions.

The Order of Malta, a lay Order of the Catholic Church and a humanitarian aid organisation, has initiated a project to provide some comfort to those sleeping rough, by distributing their specially designed "Cots for the Homeless."