

# Game on at Starship

Brave young kidney patients have banished boredom — thanks to a hi-tech gift. **John Thornton** reports

**M**ICHELLE Manu raises a hand to her face as she's being photographed, trying to shield herself from the lens of the camera. "It's scary being photographed," she says.

"You're scary... like a ghost," booms the voice of 11-year-old Jivabier Henry, sprawled in the corner, near the photographer. "I'm scary like a monster."

Jivabier and his cousin, Michelle, 12, are anything but scary — they're two delightful, well-mannered kids, although the effervescence they exude conceals the seriousness of their reason for being in Starship Hospital.

Both have suffered kidney failures and require constant monitoring at the hospital and regular treatments.

Keeping their spirits up is daunting for the hospital's staff, given the children are deprived of many things most children take for granted: school life, playing sports or any kind of outdoor activity.

But one local charity is helping. KidneyKids — a parent-driven organisation that assists children with kidney disorders and their families — has donated three PlayStation 2 units to the renal ward at Starship to make these children's lives a little brighter.

The machines are mobile units, with adjustable screens on top, that can be wheeled to a patient's bed so they can operate the console without having to strain themselves.

"The initiative was enabled by a \$20,000 donation by Baxters Healthcare," says KidneyKids chief executive Paul Furlong.

"We were given the money to manufacture the units and DisplayWorks were asked to distribute them. We are very happy to provide these machines, as it's of great help to the kids."

Evidently, the units are great sources of comfort to the children, who find the interactive immersion in a computer game an escape



Renal patients Michelle Manu, 12, and Jivabier Henry, 11, try out a new PlayStation unit at Starship **MICHELLE HYSLOP**

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PAUL FURLONG

from hospital routines.

"It makes it less boring," says Jivabier. "We used to play board games before, like Checkers, but this is way more fun."

"We have to do schoolwork first,

though, then we get to play," says Michelle, whose favourite subject is maths. "I don't like school but maths is just fun. I get 100 per cent at *everything*."

In addition to the PlayStations, the patients in Starship's renal ward can find entertainment in many other guises. The playrooms offer games to fuel their imaginations, the colourful decor breeds a soothing atmosphere and the two play specialists, Chivaun and Petra, are very popular.

KidneyKids has bigger contributions planned for Starship.

"Next year is the 21st anniversary of KidneyKids and there are some major developments planned within Starship," says Mr Furlong, stopping short of disclosing details.

"I am not allowed to tell you what they are," he smiles wryly. "But what I can tell you is there are some major initiatives planned for the anniversary and they are to be applied nationally."

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