

mates

mentor assist target engage skills

Pyramid Hill MATES Night – 9 December 2019



With Christmas fast approaching, Pyramid Hill College years 9 and 10 students held a final 2019 get together with mentors they have been working with throughout the year, and in some cases also last year.

On a scorching night, they caught up at the school for basketball, badminton and table tennis and a relaxed barbecue gathering.

2019 marked the second year the school has been involved in the MATES mentoring program, facilitated by North Central Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN). "It's a forever improving program. There are certainly successes and we'll be looking to build on those," Pyramid Hill College principal Fiona Moon said. "Being a mentor is about becoming a positive and motivating influence in someone's life. Mentors connect, encourage and inspire young people to reach their full potential.

Bolstering the self-esteem of young people and helping them set goals for the future are among the organisation's aims for the MATES mentoring program, and Principal Moon confirmed she has seen some of the students growing in confidence through working with a mentor.

Benefits for mentors can include gaining a greater insight into the challenges faced by young people and the opportunities that exist for them, as well as enabling mentors to develop their own community leadership skills.

However, there are challenges in establishing mentoring relationships. "Getting the right person to match with them is tricky," North Central LLEN project officer Barb Bear said of the process of finding suitable mentors for students.

While a well-chosen mentor would be of value for most young people, Ms Bear believes exposing Pyramid Hill College students to the mentoring program can assist in smoothing their transition to larger schools in other towns for the commencement of year 11, with their current school only holding classes up to the end of year 10.

Year 9 Pyramid Hill College student Lizzie Newell has an interest in establishing a career in the police force after school and has been paired with local policewoman Joy Jenkins who is enjoying mentoring her. Ms Newell explained how the mentoring relationship has benefited her. "She's taught me about how to get into the police force and provided tips."

While Ms Newell has found it valuable having a mentor, the two have struggled to catch up as often as they would like, with Ms Jenkins working fulltime and Ms Newell combining school with work at a local cafe.

Ms Jenkins took mentoring in her stride. "I'm happy to mentor someone, especially if they're interested in policing, to encourage them to go that way. If you don't encourage them to strive for their dreams they can just think I'm not going with that type of employment, it won't work out for me." She believes insight from someone knowledgeable in the student's field of interest is important.

"It's helped me become more confident in myself and be able to talk to people more easily," another year 9 pupil Alice Spowart said. She meets with her mentor Janette Naylor every week or two, often cooking or baking together. "We talk about what's going on in our lives and what's happening." Alice's father Phil notes she has tried a few new things since having a mentor, including playing golf, with Ms Naylor part of the local golf club.

An interesting part of the Pyramid Hill mentoring program is its ability to encourage greater interaction between people of different cultures, with a couple of students paired with Filipino mentors. In the case of student Mitch Gunther and his mentor Jeff Pacala, a common passion for sport has made it easy for them to build rapport.

"It's not really hard for me because we both love sports," Mr Pacala said, but he noted time management is important to ensure the two can spend time together despite commitments with work, school and other requirements.

Ms Bear encouraged departing 2019 year 10 students and their mentors to keep in touch with each other.



For more information about the MATES program at Pyramid Hill contact Barb Bear at the North Central LLEN on 0477 242 485 or email b.bear@ncllen.org.au