



## SUPPORTING ASYLUM SEEKER CHILDREN TO THRIVE IN EDUCATION

The time Marty McGauran volunteers in a Ballarat classroom each week is transforming a child's experience of education. The Mercy Connect volunteer mentor aims to spend two hours each week in the classroom with a grade one student who has an asylum seeker background.

Mr McGauran has spent a year building a friendship with his school buddy while working in the classroom to support his education. "English is a second language in his family which

means learning is challenging for him," he said. "But I don't want to be seen as just another teacher. The relationship and spending time with him is important."



Mercy Connect runs its asylum seeker and refugee mentor program in Ballarat, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. Around thirty volunteer mentors with education backgrounds in Ballarat support twenty students that range from prep to Year 12.

Mr McGauran signed up as a volunteer with Mercy Connect after moving to Ballarat at the beginning of last year. He was searching for a volunteering role that would utilise his skills as a school teacher.

Despite moving back to Melbourne this year for work, he has continued meeting with his Ballarat student as often as possible and when he can't make the trip to town, he sends learning videos to keep their relationship strong.

"I love seeing his own confidence grow in the school setting and his relationship with me. He runs over and gives me a hug when I arrive with a beaming smile," Mr McGauran said. "He knows there is someone coming especially for him each week and that is fantastic. It gives him the real sense there is someone supporting him in his needs. There are teachers that are there for twenty-five little kids but he knows there is one extra person who is on his side."

Mercy Connect Ballarat project coordinator Donna Stewart said the program aimed to be a bridge between cultures for a student who might be lost in a normal school setting and whose parents who might not be familiar with school in Australia.

"The students may need someone to help them do their reader because the parents aren't strong in English but we go right up until Year 12 and help with subjects at that end of the scale as well," she said.

Mercy Connect is looking for more volunteers and will soon run a recruitment drive.

Contact [Mercy Connect Ballarat](#) on 0417 626 330 for more information.

*Article courtesy of the Ballarat Courier, text and photo by Rochelle Kirkham*