

Building relationships at Sacred Heart School, Beagle Bay

“Unless you have the quality relationships and a safe, positive environment, you’re never going to get anywhere. No one is going to learn, whether it’s a teacher or student.”

Lyla Forte, Principal

Interview in 2019

Sacred Heart School school, located on the land of the Nyul Nyul people in the remote community of Beagle Bay, on the northern Kimberley coast line, caters for 90% Aboriginal students from Kindergarten to Year 10. School Principal, Lyla Forte, says the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program really brought home the feeling of needing to aspire to quality relationships on a daily

basis. “Unless you have quality relationships and a safe, positive environment, you’re never ever going to get anywhere. No-one is going to learn, whether it’s teacher or student, ” she says. Together with Assistant Principal Amy Christophers and Aboriginal Teaching Assistant Tracy Dann who also attended the SSLP, Lyla has introduced Yarning



Circles across the school to help build stronger relationships between teachers, students and families.

They started with Yarning Circle in staff meetings. Amy says she came away from the SSLP feeling empowered by a sense of all educators taking on responsibility for the standard of high expectations and giving the children an opportunity to rise

Building relationships with families

They introduced a Yarning Circle with parents for the year 5/6 and then the secondary students, particularly when there were a few meetings before students went away on camp. Lyla says initially they were nervous. "It was interesting – the parents' reaction to being part of a Yarning



to those standards. Amy says they discussed the Institute's High-expectations relationship position paper at one of the staff meetings "That was really useful and allowed us share with the other staff what we'd been learning about in the Leadership Program."

Circle and checking in. They giggled a lot. But once they'd listened to the speech and when it come to their turn they participated really well. And it also cleared that whole image of equal equality. We're all equal here. We all have something to say, and what we say will be valued."

Amy agrees that even in one meeting with secondary families the Yarning Circle made a difference. "At check in time you could see they were a bit unsure, but they still

had a go. But then by the end they're checking out, they were a lot more confident just within that one meeting. When they checked out they really shared more."

what we shouldn't do. So you have that partnership or that collaboration.



Lyla says that the Yarning Circle process helped with a meeting with the 5/6 students and families about behaviour and resulted in positive input from parents and everyone collaborating to work towards the goal rather than the school dictating what should happen. "It was one of those meetings that could have been very, negative. But because we approached it from a Yarning Circle perspective and we approached it so that the questions were not negative, the parents participated. By the end they had lots of positive things to say in terms of what we should do and

Making a difference to students

Yarning Circle are also making a big difference to the students. Lyla says, "I've just come from a kindy class. They say how they're feeling and why they're feeling it. So it's really great. It's having a big impact on our kids."

