**Wheatbelt & Beyond Youth Mentoring**

**Bruce Rock Program Outline**

As a teacher of our secondary students, I was concerned about the limited number of careers that our students were exposed to due to the size of the town and isolation from tertiary studying opportunities, and the students were unwilling to put themselves out of their comfort zone and to be exposed to new things. Everything is very familiar to our students so there is little opportunity to be put out of one’s comfort zone. For all of these reasons we decided that a mentoring program sounded like a great opportunity for our students.

Our school has been part of a mentoring program since 2011 and an evaluation of our program in 2018 has proven what a great support it has been for our students. The inception of our own Wheatbelt & Beyond Youth Mentoring program in 2019 has provided further opportunity for us to also support students in other rural and regional schools in WA. All of our students in Years 7-10 have individual mentors, the upper primary class have a class mentor and our secondary students mentor students in our junior primary classes.

Aims of the program are:

1. For students to be inspired by a young adult mentor to investigate a wider variety of jobs and career pathways than they are exposed to in Bruce Rock
2. One on one friend, confidante and support to provide young people with a sense of the broader

 world.

1. To provide another layer of pyscho-emotional support to promote positive wellbeing as young

 people transition from adolescence to adulthood.

1. To inspire and support students to achieve their goals and dreams.

The Bruce Rock DHS Wheatbelt & Beyond Youth Mentoring program is coordinated by Janine Dayman, Deputy Principal and Karen Strange, School and Community Based Liaison Officer, with support from all of the staff at the school, Wheatbelt & Beyond Youth Mentoring committee and the Bruce Rock Shire Council. Janine can be contacted through the school office during work hours on 90611237 or by email at Janine.Dayman@education.wa.edu.au or Karen at karenstrange@bigpond.com.

For adults to be eligible to join the program they must be over 18, obtain a Working with Children’s Check and not come from Bruce Rock. This is a deliberate decision to help broaden student’s horizons. The majority of our mentors are post graduate university students. They are incredible people who have had many and varied experiences in their lives. History has shown that it doesn’t matter whether the mentees are aspiring to university or not, these mentors are incredibly valuable influences on our student’s lives.

**Getting Started**

Mentors are required to complete the following things when applying to join the program:

* an application form.
* provide a Working with Children’s Check.
* a social media release form.
* mentor health/emergency contact form.
* complete the online training package and send a copy of the certificate to Janine.

When an application is received referee checks are completed and one of our Bruce Rock co-ordinators phones the mentor to discuss the program, get to know them briefly and discuss any issues they may have. Mentors are well screened before they commence the program.

Reading the application and talking to the mentor on the phone, along with good knowledge of the students and their family, allows for effective match ups of a mentor and mentee. The quality of the applicants means that it isn’t hard to get a good match, but common interests and ideas ensure a better relationship can develop. Except in extenuating circumstances, a mentor/mentees relationship remains constant until either the mentee leaves Bruce Rock DHS, or the mentor leaves the program. This could be up to 4 years. The extended relationship creates a very strong bond and allows for great achievements both personally and academically as the mentee progresses through their lower secondary education.

The school also provides mentees with training so they better understand what mentoring is, the benefits and how the program runs in our school. This includes information about goal setting, quality conversations, how to get the most out of the program and what to do if there are issues.

Once a mentee and mentor are matched and all paperwork is completed an email is sent from the school to inform the mentor of their mentee’s name and provide them with a brief information sheet, completed by the mentee, giving some background about themselves and their family. The mentee is now ready to send their first email.

**Contact**

Mentees predominantly email via their school email address, which they can access up to 3 times per week from school. They can also access their emails from home through the Department of Education’s portal. It is expected that mentors and mentees email each other at least once per week. If any party isn’t able to email within this timeframe, eg holidays, exams etc we would ask that you let the other party know and send an email at the earliest possible opportunity. Whilst emailing is the only requirement of the program other types of contact are allowed and encouraged if both parties and the parents of the mentees are in agreeance.

* Skype from a home computer is an effective way to make contact as it is free, both parties can see each other and it can be done in the evenings when mentors are more likely to be available.
* Skype from a school computer may be arranged if the mentor and mentee are available at the same time and it is organised with the school.
* Mentors and mentees are also able to contact by text and phone calls.

However, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram relationships are NOT ALLOWED.

* Face to face catch ups are encouraged and have proven to greatly enhance the relationship, but is not essential.
	+ Each year Bruce Rock DHS organises an Introductory Weekend in Bruce Rock so mentors can meet their mentee and see Bruce Rock. This usually occurs on a Friday afternoon and Saturday in about mid-March. A variety of activities are organised showcasing the places of most significance to the students (eg pool, school, recreation centre)
	+ A second Bruce Rock weekend, Winter Sport Catch Up weekend, is arranged during July/August. This is another significant part of the mentees lives.
	+ Mentees are encouraged to try to catch up with their mentor in Perth. Students and their families are often visiting Perth and we encourage them to take a little bit of time to try to catch up with their mentors. This is to be done at a neutral venue (Not at the mentor’s house) and could include anything from meeting at a park, having lunch or coffee together or attending an event together.
	+ Mentors have requested that they be informed of events happening in Bruce Rock that they may choose to attend informally. While mentees should be informing their mentor of upcoming events, I also send an email each term listing the main events happening in Bruce Rock. Some mentors choose to come up for an event. If mentors wish to attend a school or community event, please let me know so I can liaise with your mentee’s family to ensure they will be attending and, where possible, make arrangements for accommodation.
	+ As a school we are aiming to organise a couple of day trips a year to Perth to allow mentees to meet up with their mentors in their environment.
	+ Mentors are welcome to come to Bruce Rock on any weekday or weekend if they want to. If it is a school day mentors would spend the day with the students at school. If a mentor wanted to come to Bruce Rock on a weekend of their own choosing to catch up with their mentee we can try to organise something with their mentee’s family as well as accommodation.
	+ Our Year 9 & 10 students attend a week long camp in Perth usually in September. During this week mentors are invited to attend several activities, often in the evening.
	+ Mentors are welcome to attend all or part of any activity that they can make it to. If they can only make it to part of an activity that is fine.

The cost of activities organised by the school is kept to a bare minimum for all involved. We have some sponsorship that pays for venues, activities, food and accommodation in Bruce Rock and mentors are encouraged to provide fuel receipts to Wheatbelt &Beyond Youth Mentoring for reimbursement. We recognise that this is a voluntary activity, hence do everything in our power to ensure it is not expensive to be a part of.

When travelling to Bruce Rock we would recommend that mentors try to car pool where possible and travel the route from The Lakes to York to Quairading and then Bruce Rock. Travel time is approximately 2 ½ hours from Midland. Please note that you are unlikely to get phone reception from any provider except Telstra. For mentor’s safety we would ask that you update your Health and Emergency Contacts if necessary before your trip to Bruce Rock.

While face to face contact is encouraged we do recognise that mentors have their own lives and are very busy people. With that in mind we do know that it can be difficult for some mentors to attend any face to face events and may choose to only make contact by email. The only requirement of the program is emailing, so any other contact is a bonus. Whilst everyone enjoys the extra contact, history has shown that wonderful relationships have still developed with email contact only. It is the quality of the engagement that is important in whatever form that contact occurs. Everyone will get out of the program what they put in to it. If you send great emails you will receive great emails and develop a great relationship. We have seen mentees leave our school, who have continued to communicate with their mentor, even though they have never met each other.

While parents may think it is a relationship between a mentor and mentee and they stay out of the way, the involvement of the whole family, like anything in your child’s life, is invaluable. We would strongly encourage parents to talk to their child about the program to gain more understanding of it, talk about their mentor, topics of conversation they may have with them, what they have learned from their mentor and how the program makes them feel. This will help your child gain the most out of the program. We would love to see parents also become more involved in the face to face activities in Bruce Rock as well as enabling catch-ups to occur in Perth. Enormous benefits can be gained by the whole family meeting the mentor and embracing this fabulous opportunity.

**How Does The Program Run At The School?**

Mentee/Mentor match-ups are organised as early as possible in the school year. Mentees are provided with training and given a workbook to complete throughout the year.

The workbook includes

* a pre-evaluation of their social/emotional wellbeing and strengths and difficulties.
* A brainstorm of good topics of conversation is completed by the whole group.
* Information is provided about the value of setting goals and how to write a good goal. Students then set short and long term goals for themselves which they continue to work on with their mentor throughout the year. This includes discussing possible strategies and resources to achieve their goals, gaining motivation from their mentor to continue or ways to modify part of their goal where necessary, and evaluating/celebrating achievement of that goal.
* A mentor information sheet allows an opportunity to ask questions about their mentor and gives them a starting point during early emails.
* A calendar to record upcoming events, that they could discuss with their mentor, and any contact, email or other that they have received or send.

In Term 4 the students also complete post evaluation surveys. Teacher support is given to ensure the workbooks are kept up to date.

Topics of conversation should progress from more superficial topics while mentors and mentees are getting to know each other (Where they live, what they do, hobbies, interests, family, travel, sport) and become more complex and rich topics as the relationship develops to include; opportunities you or your family have had, school, study habits and techniques, options for Yr 11 & 12, career and study options, transitioning from Bruce Rock DHS to a larger school, goal setting, dreams, leaving home, friends and social issues, social and emotional development, thoughts to challenge your thinking and ideas, local, state and world news and topics of interest, developing and building on a mentees values and integrity, resilience, persistence, organisational skills, belief in their own ability, independence and individuality.

Students are given up to three opportunities a week during class time to check and send emails as well as record information. If a student hasn’t heard from their mentor for a week they have a checklist to follow so they can check for issues at their end, then they are required to send another email. If after 2 weeks they still haven’t heard from their mentor, students complete a form letting me know of the lack of communication, which is then followed up with the mentor. Some issues are school based/mentee issues and sometimes mentors just need a little reminder to make contact.

**Feedback**

At the end of each year extensive feedback is collected through a one on one interview with each mentor, mentee and the mentee’s parent/carers. This feedback is used to evaluate the program and make any necessary changes to improve it. More recently our data has been used by Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt

for an extensive study into the positive effects our very unique style of mentoring has and is having on our students. This is very exciting and highlights the benefits to all involved.

**Support**

Apart from the training which is completed by mentors and mentees, Karen and I are always available to support mentors, mentees and their families where needed. If you have any concerns about the program, a person or poor quality of contact, please don’t hesitate to contact me by phone on 90611237 or email me at Janine.Dayman@education.wa.edu.au.

We also have a Bruce Rock WBYM Facebook page that I would encourage all mentors to join as it is an effective line of communication for events as well as supporting each other. I think one of the great things that happened with our mentors a couple of years ago was when a mentor organised for any interested mentors from our program to meet for dinner. It was advertised on the Bruce Rock Mentoring Facebook page and a number of mentors met to get to know each other and provide support for each other.

As this program is reliant on good electronic communication I would ask all participants to please respond to any communication from Karen or myself by phone, Facebook or text in a timely manner. Responses don’t need to be long or elaborate, just a yes or no reply will often be enough. It can be very time consuming and difficult to organise events if mentors don’t reply, hence the need for follow up prompts.

**How to make a good relationship great?**

- Frequent, quality communication

- Variety of communication types where possible (eg email, skype, text, face to face)

- Whole family being a part of the program (eg joining in events, talking to your child about their experiences with

 the program, making an effort to attend events in Bruce Rock as well as making time for your child to meet their

 mentor in Perth, parents to meet the mentors)

- Mentees to join in face to face events even if their mentor isn’t able to make it.

- Seek support quickly if there are any concerns about the program

Remember, the more you put in to the program the more you will get out of it!