

First-ever chaplain for Yarloop PS

THE beginning of the school year is an exciting time for most people, but it was particularly special for everyone involved with Yarloop Primary School, who were able to return to their school for the first time in a year.

The 2016 Yarloop bushfires destroyed nearly 150 homes and buildings - including many of historic significance.

The school was also damaged by the fire and safety concerns surrounding the clean-up meant students were not able to return until this year.

In the past, Yarloop PS had a support chaplain for half a day per week and this positive experience resulted in the school applying for funding to get their own permanent chaplain.

Darrell Higginbottom has been a YouthCARE chaplain for the past 10 years, having previously been a chaplain in Perth and in Harvey.

A resident of the South West for the past 6 years, he has fitted in seamlessly with the Yarloop school community.

"I'm really enjoying being at the school," he said.

"I've been well supported, appreciated and utilised by the school community."

In just one term, Darrell has already run several programs including a manual arts program for pre-primary and kindy students to help refine motor skills, a life skills program, outdoor program and other team building initiatives.

"I've also worked with students one-on-one," he said.

"The bushfires obviously had a large impact on the local community and I've been working with families to help them process that.

"Being able to move back to town and school has been a real positive in helping people return to normality, but there is still a long way to go."

Principal John Collis said he was delighted when the school received its funding at the end of last year.

"It's great to know that we have Darrell two full days a week, for the next two years - that consistency is really important," he said.

"The chaplaincy program has been very successful – especially with helping with the transition back to Yarloop.

"The programs are always very interesting and feedback from parents and the general community has been really positive.

"The Stormbirds program [which helps children deal with grief] helped the kids through a difficult time.

"The kids are always happy to see him, and he gets a big cheer when introduced at assembly."

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