



**MERCY CONNECT**

MERCY WORKS

# CONNECTIVITY

## Mercy Connect Sydney

**20 July 2020**

Welcome to the latest edition of CONNECTIVITY.

As I write there are tentative plans for volunteers to return to mentoring in some Sydney schools during Term 3. As the situation in NSW changes and with the continuing uncertainty and concerns about a second wave of infections, it is unclear what form volunteering will take once volunteers are allowed to return to schools.

**Our thoughts are with our colleagues in Victoria as they face very challenging circumstances.**

Some volunteers have chosen not to return this year because of ongoing health concerns or because a family member has health concerns. Many have adopted a wait and see approach especially as concerns about a second wave of infections in NSW grows. Most have indicated a desire to return to volunteering.

Only a few volunteers were able to start volunteering in schools in 2020 before the **COVID19 pandemic** saw lockdowns put in place and the introduction of on-line learning in schools in Term One. During Term Two, schools began returning to normal and by week 4 all students were expected to attend. However, because of ongoing health concerns all non-essential external providers were excluded from schools with an anticipated return sometime in Term 3.

During this time, some Mercy Connect volunteers established ways to stay in touch and continued to mentor older high school students as well as adults from the adult conversation classes while schools had restrictions on volunteer visits.

- In one school, the in-school coordinator has established a WhatsApp group. In the group are the in-school coordinator, the volunteer mentor and the senior students. All communication via the WhatsApp group is monitored by the in-school coordinator

and the student can seek help from the volunteer (eg posting a challenging maths problem or asking the volunteer to clarify the wording of an assessment task or question).

- In some cases where our volunteers mentor adults (at Harmony House, Guildford and Hilltop Road), the volunteer and parent have exchanged email details as adults and support can be provided in this way. At Hilltop Road volunteers engage with refugee parents via bi-weekly zoom meetings.
- Other volunteers are communicating via the in-school coordinator. They send an email for the child to the in-school coordinator to approve then forward to the child and when the child responds the email is passed on. The child is not given the volunteer's email details.
- Another volunteer who is supporting mature-aged students with their HSC Physics problems has been providing mentoring support through the school email with the permission of the school to work through Physics problems with HSC students.



Mercy Connect has been working with Linda Drayton from CDEP to establish protocols to ensure all safety measures are in place for the safe return to schools of volunteers. Volunteers in state schools will be guided by in-school coordinators on a school by school basis.

As the health and safety of our volunteers are most important to Mercy Connect, we are asking volunteers not to visit any of the campuses involved in the Mercy Connect project until approval has been given by the school principal for volunteering to resume. In the majority of cases it is anticipated that this will be in some time in Term 3 in accordance with directives from the school's governing body.

**The decision to return to volunteering is a personal one based on each volunteer's circumstances.**

If you decide you wish to return to volunteering and approval has been given for volunteering to begin, we ask each volunteer to confirm with the school the following before they enter any school campus:

- That you have not travelled overseas, Victoria or to cluster locations in NSW within the last 14 days;
- That you are not showing signs and symptoms of COVID-19 (fever; flu like symptoms such as coughing, sore throat or headaches; or have difficulty breathing);
- That you have not had close or casual contact\* with a person who has been confirmed with COVID-19; and
  - \* Casual contact is having been face-to-face for less than 15 minutes, or in the same closed space for less than two hours, with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 when that person was infectious. Close contact is having been face-to-face for at least 15 minutes or been in the same closed space for at least two hours, with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 when that person was infectious.**
- That you will follow the school's directions regarding hygiene practices while on campus. That is
  - Sanitise your hands when entering the school and at regular intervals.
  - Wash your hands regularly for 20 to 30 seconds.
  - If soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
  - Hand sanitiser does not replace washing your hands after using the bathroom.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
  - Cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or cough into your elbow.
  - Dispose used tissues into a bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards.
  - Practice social distancing:
    - Keep a distance of 1.5 metres between you and other people
    - Avoid crowds and large public gatherings
    - Avoid shaking hands or any other physical contact

Currently there are five potential volunteers waiting to be trained. Mercy Connect is now developing on-line training workshops to deliver to potential volunteers via Zoom. **It is also anticipated that on-going training and development for the foreseeable future will be delivered remotely via Zoom Workshop.**

## **Mercy Connect One-to-One Mentoring Guidelines.**

As a Mercy Connect volunteer supporting refugee students in schools you may be asked to provide individual support for a student on a one-to-one basis.

Mercy Connect is committed to creating an environment where one-to-one mentoring support for children is conducted in ways that identify and mitigate risks to children, without compromising a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connection and learning opportunities.

### **While working at a school, the volunteer will at all times follow the protocols of that school for volunteers supporting children.**

Ideally, interactions at school are to be conducted in an open or visible space or within the clear line of sight of another adult. This may be within the classroom, in an open-space adjacent to the classroom (such as on the veranda or in the bag room) or in a breakout area- for example in a library under the general supervision of the library staff.

In addition, a one-to-one mentoring activity may be conducted on-line via a platform such as zoom, Whatsapp or similar approved on-line learning platform used by the school.

### **Mercy Connect advises against direct email communication contact with students.**

Feedback and input from volunteers, teachers, classroom assistants, parents/carers and children involved are monitored and analysed by the relevant manager/in-school coordinator/ Mercy Connect coordinator and results reported to the MW Board annually.

## **Definitions**

**“Child”** means any person under the age of 18 years.

**“A private place”** means a place not owned by a public institution and includes property owned by the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea.

**“Parent”** means a person over the age of 18 who provides care to a child for whom they have parental responsibility.

**“Carer”** means a person over the age of 18 years who provides care to a child for whom they do not have parental responsibility (such as a grandparent).

**“Volunteer”** means a person trained and authorised by Mercy Connect to provide mentoring to students in educational settings.

## **One to One Mentoring via Zoom, Whatsapp or other platforms**

- a. The student will not be online in their bedroom (or any other bedroom) during the session.
- b. Student filming will be done in a communal area in the home with no closed doors.
- c. A parent or carer is to be present during the session or if in an open-plan area to be in the vicinity for the duration of the lesson if the student is under 18 or is a vulnerable adult.
- d. Volunteers are not to film from their bedroom or in a closed-door room.
- e. Volunteers are not to film from a public area where students could be visible to members of the public, including other volunteers and family members.
- f. Volunteers students and parents must be dressed in a manner appropriate to a normal mentoring activity.

### **Recording of Mentoring Sessions**

- a. Video recording of sessions are not allowed.
- b. Screen shots are not allowed (i.e. still pictures being taken during a live feed or from a recording).

### **Arrangements for Mentoring Sessions**

- a. Arrangements for on-line mentoring are to be made through the child's teacher or the in-school coordinator. In cases where students or the parents have emailed the teacher, the teacher is to keep a record of all communication from themselves and from the students and parents to the teacher.
- b. No personal communication is to take place with student/parent via these platforms: telephone/personal email/social media/chatrooms/gaming apps.
- c. The Mercy Connect Volunteer Code of Conduct must remain in place in terms of professional boundaries.
- d. Should there be any complaint or incident of concern during or after a session, the volunteer/student/parent is to report this immediately through the usual Safeguarding route.
- e. Depending on the level of concern, online mentoring may be suspended while a safeguarding matter is investigated.
- f. Volunteers and the classroom teachers will keep a record of all sessions arranged.

## **Mentoring Session Times**

A mentoring session should only take place during the usual session times. (i.e. not late at night). For example a volunteer supporting a student studying from home would conduct the session during school time.

## **Parental Consent**

Parents may be required to give their permission if the student is under 18, or is a vulnerable adult.

*If you are involved in video conference (always with the teachers/in-school coordinator's consent and according to the school's protocols), here are some suggestions*

### Tips for preparing for a video call

- Place your device on a firm surface, using your cover or something similar as a tripod to free your hands for gesturing and showing objects.
- Try to keep the light source in front of you, excessive sun glare behind you leads to poor quality video.
- Minimise background noise (such as the washing machine or radio).
- Before making the call, volunteers should contact the classroom teacher or in-school coordinator to let them know the timing and details of the session and to find out what areas should be addressed in the video session or perhaps should be avoided
- Prepare the child before the call to help manage their expectations. For example, ask them to pick out their favourite toy or drawing so they can show and talk about it.
- Start with shorter calls (around five minutes) and increase the length as you see fit.

### Tips for maintaining interest

- Try to maintain eye contact and talk about things that is important to the student
- Vary activities in the session. Start with a chat, then move onto topics or activities suggested by the teacher, read a book to the student or have them read to you. For senior students it is most likely related to set course materials or assessments. For adult learners activities revolve around conversation or vocabulary activities. Younger students may want to tell you news. You may wish to share an appropriate film clip.
- Set aside some books or articles to use for video calls. You can carry on reading longer books with older children each time you call.
- Try out various filters or virtual backgrounds built into your apps to make it more interesting for kids and give you something else to talk about.

Articles highlighting the activities of Mercy Connect have appeared in the MercyWorks magazine “Bilum” and on the MercyWorks Facebook page.

There have been a series of profiles of volunteers and the most recent article focusses on the bond built through mentoring .



## ‘Life Guardian & A Gift of Trust’

A Gift of Trust

by Mercy Connect Volunteer,  
Christine


In early 2015 I was introduced to Rodiyah, described as withdrawn and in need of friendship and support. Shyly she responded to my gentle enquiries and when asked to write just an easy description of a good memory from her life in Yemen, she offered up a small heart wrenching account of her life before arriving in Australia.

It features **Christine Jingha**, a long term volunteer and **Rodiyah**. Their story also was used as the focus for the MercyWorks fundraising campaign in 2020.

Mercy Works  
June 12 · 🌐

Meet Rodiyah & Her Life Guardian  
Read Her Story Now: <https://bit.ly/3dqBnHd>  
Donate Here: <https://bit.ly/2XsVIMd>

'MEET RODIAYH'



"I came to Sydney when I was 18 years old and I went to study at Bankstown Senior college."

READ HER STORY

Profiles of Sydney Mercy Connect volunteers and volunteers in other states have also been a feature of the Facebook posts.

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Mercy Connect Sydney Volunteer, Jim shares his story with Mercy Works in the June Edition of the Mini Bilum

Read his story: <https://bit.ly/2YBd1EF>



**SYDNEY**  
"I hadn't expect so much", says manufacturing who joined the Connect program in 2019. Jim to a Mercy Connect advertise the Sydney Morning Herald and completing training, found his

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**Mercy Works**  
July 12 at 5:00 PM · 🌐

Check out our latest article on the Catholic Outlooks' website!  
Read it here: <https://bit.ly/3iEulMv>



CATHOLICOUTLOOK.ORG  
**Mercy Connect – Creating Connections**  
Mercy Connect – Creating Connections



**Mercy Works**

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Our latest edition of The 'Mini' Bilum is OUT NOW!

Read here: <https://bit.ly/2ZhmpO7>



OUR NEWEST EDITION  
**the 'mini' bilum**  
out now!

June