

Carin's story . . .

Carin Symond oversees the Intensive English Unit at Anula Primary School and employs Bilingual Officers to support newly arrived students and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. The Bilingual Officers come from a variety of backgrounds that match the cultural diversity of the student population as closely as possible. Many of these staff members come from refugee backgrounds.

Carin says Fatuma is one of the Bilingual Officers who play a crucial role in communications between the school and the families of students. "The links they make with the wider community is invaluable," she said. "School events are enriched by their presence and they offer a whole different perspective and broaden the experiences of the whole school community."

"Without exception, I have found our staff (from culturally diverse backgrounds) to be respectful of others, willing to be involved in all school events, even after hours, and are very giving of their time, expertise and experience."

Like other employers, Carin has also discovered that the cultural respect her staff have for people of authority can hinder them from voicing their concerns. She believes it is important to work on developing a rapport and taking the time just to talk, so that they may feel more comfortable in expressing their opinions.

Carin has learnt to listen carefully, speak in a more considered way and realises that the message she conveys may not always be the message that is received. "Sometimes we are taken very literally by our staff. There was an occasion where new staff were asked to bring a plate for morning tea. Most of us would realise that the plate would need some food on it, but these new staff members simply brought a plate with nothing on it!"

Despite the initial barriers in communication Carin believes that the benefits from employing people like Fatuma far outweigh the challenges. "Personally, I have been grateful to work in an environment where I have had my eyes opened to a world beyond our boundaries."



Carin Symonds
Assistant Principal
Anula Primary School
and Fatuma

Proudly supported by



The Westpac Foundation

Supporting our communities