



Picture: SIMON DEAN

# Mentors make a difference

## Beverley Hudec

IT'S National Youth Mentoring week and Love Foundation director Vicki Conlon has brought a successful initiative to northern beaches high schools.

Three years ago Mrs Conlon approached Pittwater High School with a mentoring program.

"Mentoring is very important to help our communities build healthy relationships and increase the self-esteem and happiness of our young people," Mrs Conlon said.

"It makes a real difference to just have someone who's not connected to their school or family to run their ideas by."

Mrs Conlon cites one simple playground incident as a successful pairing of mentor and mentee at the school.

"Sitting in the playground was a mentor with his year 8 mentee and he was explaining how to change a bike tyre. It was

one of those small life experiences and it was awesome to see," she said.

Mrs Conlon said that the decision to become involved in the mentoring program is up to the student and parental consent is sought.

Pittwater High School has 15 mentors working with year 8 and 9 students over a 10-week period.

"We are now in our third year of the program. Over 40 students have benefited from it on different levels," principal Ross Cusworth said.

"Mentors provide an independent level of advice, support and encouragement and students develop a trust with them. Our mentors are mums, dads, grandparents, we have a huge age range."

Mr Cusworth said that the school carefully allocated mentor with mentee, working with the school counsellor and advisers.

"It's there for students who are going

through stress in their lives, it's not for naughty kids."

Mr Cusworth said that at the end of each 10-week program the school held an awards ceremony to acknowledge the mentors' contribution. "We value our mentors and we place a high value on the welfare support of students. We are keen to continue the scheme."

The mentoring program has been implemented at several northern beaches high schools including Mackellar Girls Campus and Cromer Campus, where three mentors are steering it through its first year.

Mentor Lara Cox, 31, (pictured), is new to the role. Since mid-year she has been working with 15-year-old year 9 students at Cromer.

The second-year psychotherapy student came to the program through her second-year studies at uni. "I've been a youth

worker and I have always enjoyed being with children and young people," she said.

She calls herself a "safe space" and feels that she has built up a good rapport.

The Young Love Foundation is looking for new volunteer mentors to expand its high school program in 2010.

"We are particularly looking for male mentors who might like to volunteer at North Sydney Boys High School for one hour each week," Mrs Conlon said.

"There are no prerequisites to being a youth mentor, just a great capacity to listen and an interest in young people."

Mrs Conlon said that all mentors complete an accredited TAFE training at TAFE Outreach, Crows Nest, in term one and undergo all Working With Children Checks, as well as providing personal and employment references.

For more information, visit [www.younglove.org.au](http://www.younglove.org.au)