

The creation of the METWELL program (Marist Education Two Way Exchange Life Learning)

One of Marist180's existing programs, the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors (UHM) program, welcomes orphans seeking safe haven and security, and has created homes and provides residential care for a group of children and young people from a variety of countries, principally Afghanistan. In September and October 2022, we welcomed 46 children and young people into care, under the guardianship of the NSW Minister for Families and Communities, supported by the Department of Home Affairs.

In 2024, a new program was launched, the culmination of ideas conceived in 2023 through a collaboration between several Marist schools and Marist180. A consultative approach has led to the identification of education/learning and culture as the program's foundation, culminating in the creation of the METWELL (*Marist Education Two Way Exchange Life Learning*) program.

The pilot program has paired Year 11 students from Parramatta Marist High with UHM young people who are in Years 7 to 10. They have met weekly for about an hour to engage in group bonding activities related to education, including homework, school projects, assignments, and culture. Running during terms 2 and 3 in 2024, with some holiday connections, the program also featured a day with the Western Sydney Wanderers Football Club, guest speakers and careers exploration activities, designed to engage, inspire and educate the group.



This group came together this week for an end of year celebration. Each participant - UHM young people and Parramatta Marist High students - was recognised and presented with a certificate reflecting their important role in the program. Due to privacy considerations, our UHM young people have been pixellated.

Building on this, we have a second METWELL group which commenced in the ACT. The inaugural session took place in October 2024, where five of our UHM young people connected with eight students and three teachers from Marist College, Canberra. There was a strong sense of community and collaboration from all present.



The young people connected through various activities, naturally forming pairs/trios for future sessions.

This first meeting created left a very positive impression on our five UHM young people. Our young people expressed a real sense of sadness that this program was only going to be a 4-week pilot for an hour a week in 2024. They want more!



They brought homework and assignments and appreciated the time, the support, and the beginning of new relationships.

We are excited to have the METWELL program up and running. The program exemplifies how sport, fun, curiosity and learning can bring people, and cultures, together.

We have reviewed both the initial experiences and now look to consolidate and build on these in 2025.

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