

Making the most of mentoring

NAME: PJ AGE: 18 STUDYING: Year 11, 2017, Scotch College, Melbourne FROM: Wadeye, NT

PJ was 14 when he applied for a scholarship to attend Scotch College, Melbourne. Hailing from the remote community of Wadeye, about 400km south west of Darwin, PJ was a little nervous, but mainly excited about going to a large boarding school and living in the city. Now in Year 12, PJ's favourite thing about Scotch is the friendships he has made. "I love hanging around with friends in the boarding house from everywhere – from overseas, from around Australia. And I love sport; there's a lot of camaraderie there, everyone gets around and supports everyone." One of his close mates, who shares his love of AFL, is his AIEF Mentor Gareth Whitten, a Senior Software Development Engineer at Allens.

Gareth first heard about the AIEF Mentor Program at work. "I had a chat with my family and my two older kids encouraged me. I wasn't sure how they would react, or if it was something I should do, but they both thought I'd be a good mentor to someone." Gareth and PJ both arrived early for their first meeting and circled the block, unknowingly passing one another again and again. "When I saw PJ inside I thought, 'There you go, we've both been doing the same thing!' When we got in there, we were both a bit nervous, but he's pretty easy to talk to; I was quite lucky with who I got matched with." For PJ, Gareth is someone he can talk to about anything. "We chat about school work, how his work is going; sometimes we kick the footy around on the oval at school. The best thing about Gareth is he's very talkative, but I can tell him things that for me are quite private, we've become really close."

They talk about life at boarding school, and back home. "I'd like for Gareth to come to Wadeye. I'd show him the rock art sites, rock paintings, take him fishing. I think he'd be alright at it, you just need patience with fishing."

Gareth says PJ is both "a typical teenage boy" and an impressive young man with maturity beyond his years. "During the school holidays when he goes back home, PJ actually does mentoring for some of the kids in the community that maybe have run into a little bit of trouble, a kind of youth work with a group in his town. They might go out bush for a few days to help these young guys and girls sort themselves out a little bit. It's pretty gobsmacking that a kid of 18 is doing something like that. I've just turned fifty and I'm just coming to mentoring. But that's PJ. If he puts his mind to something, he'll just blitz it."

Get to know your mentor well; talk to them. They'll support you in the years to come." PJ's advice to other students is to build a strong relationship with your mentor as there are many things you can learn from them. "Get to know your mentor well; talk to them. They'll support you in the years to come.

They'll help you with study. Gareth says if I ever need any help to just call him or text him. He's told me, with Year 12, to make sure I do a bit of work each night, take things as they come, but to enjoy it as it's the last time I'll be at school." For Gareth, mentoring has been a much easier and relaxed process than he thought it would be. "It's very rewarding and nowhere near as difficult as you might think. I don't know if it's just PJ, but our relationship is very easy. It's basically just having a chat with somebody and forming a friendship."

After finishing Year 12, PJ intends to spend some time travelling the world before returning to spend time with his family in his home community, and considering courses at university. Gareth says, "PJ is going to go far. It's not just helping him, it's also about helping him achieve whatever he ends up doing and the broader impact that will have. He will be magnificent."