



BALLARAT
FOUNDATION

IMPACT IN ACTION



Youth Support: Finding Belonging



28% of youth in Ballarat feel lonely



60% of youth don't feel heard



Youth offending has increased by 36.8%



Long term mental health conditions in youth is 55% higher in Ballarat compared to Victorian average

For children who have experienced trauma, neglect, or instability, forming trusting relationships and participating in group environments can feel overwhelming. Many arrive at Southern Cross Kids' Camp carrying anxiety, social withdrawal, and a deep sense of disconnection from others.

Southern Cross Kids' Camp Ballarat provides trauma-informed camps for vulnerable children using a unique 1:1 Buddy model, where each child is paired with a dedicated adult mentor throughout the camp experience. The approach creates emotional safety, consistent support, and opportunities for children to gradually build trust, confidence, and connection with others.

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Lucy's story

When Lucy (pseudonym) attended her first camp in 2022, she stayed on the edges of activities and avoided interacting with other children. She carried her backpack everywhere as a form of comfort and protection and often withdrew from

group activities when she felt overwhelmed. Her Buddy sat quietly alongside her, providing patient support without pressure or judgement. Lucy later reflected, “I was nervous about leaving mum the first time... mum said camp was a safe place because I was scared. It helped me forget about the bad stuff I was going through.”

Over four consecutive years, Lucy returned to the same supportive environment and gradually began participating more fully in camp life. She moved from watching activities to joining them, formed friendships with other Campers, and built trusting relationships with leaders and Buddies.

By her final camp in 2025, Lucy arrived excited to reconnect with friends and immediately immersed herself in activities. The most significant moment came when she noticed a new Camper standing alone looking anxious and isolated. Lucy approached her, introduced herself, and invited her to join the group. Within minutes, the child was smiling and participating. Lucy had become the person creating belonging for someone else.

Outcomes

Foundation Outcome 2 - Increased community connection and cohesion

Lucy’s journey demonstrates the power of safe relationships and consistent community connection in helping young people move from isolation to participation. Through repeated positive experiences of trust, inclusion, and encouragement, she developed the confidence to connect with others and contribute positively to her community.

The program supported Lucy to:

- Build friendships and trusted relationships with peers and adult mentors
- Feel safe and welcomed within a supportive community environment
- Increase participation in group activities and shared experiences
- Develop empathy and confidence to support others experiencing isolation
- Transition from being socially withdrawn to becoming an active leader and connector within the camp community

Lucy reflected on the experience by saying, “Camp was a happy place, because it felt safe & I felt welcome. It was nice to have a break from my family & meet new people & friends.”

Why this matters

The significance of this change extends beyond a single camp experience. Children who experience trauma often face ongoing barriers to trust, participation, and social connection. By creating a consistent environment of belonging and emotional safety, Southern Cross Kids’ Camp helped Lucy develop the confidence and relational skills needed to participate more positively in community life.

Importantly, the story demonstrates how connection can become self-sustaining. Lucy not only experienced belonging herself, but actively created it for another child. This shift from recipient of support to contributor and leader reflects a deeper strengthening of community cohesion and social participation.

Lucy now hopes to return to the program as a junior leader, continuing the cycle of support, empathy, and inclusion for future Campers.

Photos: Southern Cross Kid’s Camp 2026

