

## Auslan chaplain breaks the silence with Deaf students

THE room is silent, but there is plenty being said between YouthCARE chaplain Corey Piestrzeniewicz and a couple of students.

Mrs Piestrzeniewicz is the first YouthCARE chaplain to be placed because of her knowledge of Auslan – the sign language of the Australian Deaf community.

She has been a YouthCARE chaplain at Shenton College Deaf Education Centre for the past 1.5 years and has enjoyed every moment.

“I love being a chaplain as it gives you the chance to be a positive support to a young person, to inspire hope and bring unconditional love and acceptance, with no strings attached,” she said.

Mrs Piestrzeniewicz worked for the WA Deaf Society as a Paraprofessional Auslan Interpreter, before making the switch to chaplaincy.

“I thought it would be a great opportunity to still be in the Deaf community and work specifically with young people in a very privileged position,” she said.

“It takes a lot of courage and trust for a teenager to open up and be vulnerable with someone.

“The fact that I get to be that person for these students is a huge honour that I don't take lightly.

“Being able to communicate effectively without needing an interpreter, has given the students the opportunity to talk to someone who knows the uniqueness of their culture and community in a private and confidential setting - it brings a sense of comfort and ease to the situation.”

Principal Leanne Potter said Corey was a valued member of the school community.

“Corey has been a gift to our Deaf school,” she said.

“Not only does she visit students out of hours in homes and hospitals when they are unwell, she does the same for staff - often armed with food.

“It is really important to have someone in the school like a chaplain, because they fill the rather large cracks that can appear, that teachers have no time to attend to.”

Ms Potter said it was wonderful that Corey could take the time to notice, support and care for Deaf adolescents in a fast-paced IT-filled world.

“Perhaps the most unique thing about our chaplain is that she is a NAATI qualified Auslan (sign language) interpreter, so is able to bridge all communication gaps when she supports our students, their families and our staff,” she said.

“As far as we know, we have the only Chaplain/Interpreter in Australia and we are very proud of our Australian First.”

-ends-