Let your Mercy be on us
As we place our trust in you

This is a special edition of our school newsletter.

Many of you know Matt Shawcross for his work here at school as Deputy Principal, Student Wellbeing Leader, Special Needs coordinator amongst other roles. His other passion is cricket and his beloved Sunshine Heights Cricket Club.

Through both our school and the cricket club he has supported so many young people in developing a sense of belonging and feeling connected to their communities. Sport has been instrumental in much of this.

You may be aware of the grievous incidents that occurred in Melbourne over the weekend, particularly on Saturday evening, involving young people from many cultural groups. Despite the diverse groups of people involved, media has focused their attention on the South Sudanese young people. While recognizing the very serious offences that occurred on Saturday evening, there is a danger of attributing the actions of some, to all young people of South Sudanese heritage.

We know from the Sth Sudanese families here at our school, and all those who have been part of our community in years past, that they are good people. I want our Sth Sudanese families to know that. To this end, I have shared a post that Matt put up on social media last night about his thoughts on the challenges facing our Sth Sudanese families right now. Please take some time to read it.

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School finishes for Term 1 on Thursday, March 24 at 1.10pm

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It is with a heavy heart that I write tonight in support of the many South Sudanese Australian families whom I consider friends.

The events of last weekend were dreadful - make NO mistake. There is much work to be done to find ways to restore inner peace in the lives of these troubled young people who wreaked havoc on our city centre.

However, my focus today rests on the many thousands of young South Sudanese Australians (our fellow citizens) and their families who are hurting deeply. Through no fault of their own, they are being tarred with the same brush - a brush that is extremely cruel, extremely un-Australian.

In my role as a leader in education and local sport, I feel compelled to speak out in support of the wonderful South Sudanese Australians whom I have had the absolute privilege of knowing over the past 16 years - the families with whom I've had the privilege of sharing meals, the privilege of teaching their children to read, write and count, the privilege of witnessing them grow into fine young Australians who are making their parents, families and friends very proud.

*People like David Deng* - a young boy I had the pleasure of knowing many years ago who is now studying his Masters of Business.

*People like Akat Mayoum* - an unbelievable young leader within the South Sudanese and wider community.

*People like Adaw Yuat* - one of the most caring, generous young people I've ever taught and a beacon for social justice both here in Australia and abroad.

*People like Akon Mawien* - a highly talented cricketer at Premier level.

I have deliberately highlighted these young people as examples of South Sudanese Australian success stories because they are NOT famous. They do, however, represent the vast majority of South Sudanese Australians who are 'kicking goals'.

So how is it that these young people have succeeded where others have clearly failed? The answer lies in a sense of belonging. These young people, who I have the honour of knowing, BELONG. They belong to their school, they belong to their sports club, they belong to their university, to their career, to their community. They belong because they have been lucky enough to feel welcomed, to feel included, to feel embraced by people of ALL walks of life. Their stories have been shared, they have been acknowledged, they have been understood.

In these tough times, I urge everyone to resist the temptation to simply throw our collective hands in the air, say it's all too hard and resort to generalised statements about an entire community. Surely, we are better than this!

Rather, let's ensure we continue to promote and celebrate MULTICULTURALISM - true Multiculturalism! It does work (I know - I've seen it work every day for 20 years).

Whilst it may be too late for many of those involved in rioting on the weekend, it certainly is not for the thousands of young people I have encountered.

I want to leave you by referring to my image of a young South Sudanese Australian, Bol Abiem, who is an up and coming off-spinner at my local cricket club, Sunshine Heights. He is pictured leading his team off the field having taken career-best figures of 5 for 11 in a recent Under 15 semi-final. I love the shy sense of pride on his face but more importantly, I love the support and sense of belonging offered in the background by his teammates - teammates from all walks of life, teammates from India, teammates from Sri Lanka, teammates from Greece and Macedonia, teammates from Italy, teammates from Uganda and Pakistan, teammates from detention centres!

This is Bol's GANG!

Matt Shawcross