Mentors inspire with message of support

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Year 11 student Nicolle is a mentor to year 8 students Kate, Laura and Elyse.
Picture: Brenton Edwards. Source: The Advertiser

FUN and games devised to build relationships, self-esteem and teamwork are bringing junior and senior students together at Mary MacKillop College.

Since 2004, all Year 10 students at the school have been trained as peer support mentors and usually about 15 girls go on to mentor groups of six to eight Year 8 girls.

Year 10 pastoral care co-ordinator Jeanene Corbo said while the students tended to play games, each game had a purpose.

"It certainly builds some really good relationships between the students and they learn all sorts of things such as decision-making, self-esteem, communication and co-operation," she said.

This year, Year 11 student Nicolle mentored Year 8 students Kate, Laura and Elyse during 40 minute sessions held about once every three weeks for the first two school terms.

Teachers at Mary MacKillop were trained through Peer Support Australia, which has worked with 1000 schools nationally.

National education manager Sharlene Chadwick travelled to Adelaide for the first time to train 22 teachers from a number of local schools in peer support skills last week.

She said positive peer relationships could make a real difference in a school and having an older student mentor a younger student could often be more beneficial than siblings because it was less emotionally loaded.

"Older students don't always realise the importance of their behaviour but it's powerful as a role model and for single children, this can be especially important when they're getting a lot of mixed messages," she said.