



press clip

Program making life easier for families

REGION - Families in Ararat and surrounding districts will now benefit from a program providing relief for those struggling with the costs of sending children back to school.

The Ballarat Foundation has traditionally operated the Back to School Program within the City of Ballarat, but has expanded the boundaries to cover rural and regional areas.

The shires of Ararat, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Hepburn, Moorabool, and the Western half of Golden Plains will now be included.

Through the Back to School Program, Target vouchers to the value of \$50 will be distributed to disadvantaged families at selected schools.

This year \$41,800 worth of vouchers will be discreetly awarded across 68 government primary schools, to assist families to purchase books, uniforms and other equipment needed for the school year.

Leveraging on an initiative of the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR), the project is supported by the Sidney Myer Fund, Pratt Foundation, Bennelong Foundation, DOXA Youth Foundation, the Estate of the late Edward Wilson and Target.

Ballarat Foundation CEO, Noel Trengove, said he was proud to be able to channel the funds to regional areas.

"We are not a 'doing' organisation so people don't see a lot of us out in the community, but we are pleased to be able to direct funds to where they are needed most," Mr Trengove said.

Schools decide which families will receive the vouchers on a case by case basis, as only a limited number are available to each school.



Ararat North Primary School's Geoff White accepts Back to School Program vouchers from the Ballarat Foundation's Noel Trengove.

Picture: PETER PICKERING

Mr Trengove said the vouchers aimed to assist people who, despite their best efforts, were failing to make ends meet.

"The vouchers are a way of rewarding people who have done the hard yards but are not quite making it," he said.

"After the enormous cost of Christmas, many families find it difficult to make ends meet and struggle to ensure that their children start school with even the basic requirements.

"With everyone struggling with the increased financial stress, this year is harder than most."

Once the vouchers have been distributed, schools are encouraged to raise further funds themselves, as a way of continuing to assist their school families.

With the support of FRRR, The Ballarat Foundation is able to double any contribution made by individual schools.

"It is an added bonus that we have been able to double the

amount in recent years. So now, if the school raises \$50 we will give them two \$50 vouchers, Mr Trengove said.

"Knowing the benefits, the school's involved are only too ready to assist in raising funds and distributing vouchers."

Schools in Ararat Rural City to benefit from the program include Ararat North Primary School, Ararat Primary School, Ararat West Primary School, Lake Bolac College, Willaura Primary School, Buangor Primary School and Elmhurst Primary School.

Under the Pyrenees Shire, Amphitheatre, Avoca Primary School, Beaufort Primary School, Landsborough Primary School, Moonambel Primary School, Trawalla Primary School and Waubra Primary School will all be included.

In the Northern Grampians Shire, Great Western Primary School will be involved in the program.