

Reaching out to refugees

By CASEY NEILL

FORMER refugee John Iramiyan is returning the favour to Australia's newest arrivals.

He was appointed as Coles Noble Park's store manager in October last year.

"They wanted someone to come in and support the team," he said.

Mr Iramiyan decided the business would improve with a focus on people and reached out to the community.

He asked nearby Yarraman Oaks Primary School how he could help and a breakfast club was the answer.

"Six months later, we've got a really good program with them," he said.

Twice a week the store supplies 20 to 30 kids with fresh milk, bread and fruit and has since launched a second breakfast club at Noble Park Primary School.

A work experience program to support the Dandenong and Noble Park language centres followed.

He now welcomes several refugees and migrants into the store each week.

"Every participant in the program gets a uniform and a name badge to really make them feel part of the team," Mr Iramiyan said. "We make sure they are invited to all team member huddles and celebrations."

"We have a one-metre rule in our store, where if a customer is within one metre they turn around and say hello. "We get them to be comfortable about being uncomfortable."



Hong stacks shelves. 143269

He said the students also learnt to communicate with staff and each other and to appraise their performance.

They spend time in different departments, are paired with a mentor, and go through the standard induction process before they hit the floor.

"While they're here they're part of the structure," he said. Mr Iramiyan helps them to prepare a job application and encourages them to

apply for roles within the Wesfarmers umbrella. "They've got a head-start," he said.

John was born in Iraq, raised in Greece and arrived in Australia as a refugee in 1980.

"I'm in the best job and the best country in the world and I've got to give back," he said.

"I remember how the doors opened for me."

Erika Jones is a teacher at the Springvale AMES site and came to Australia as a Hungarian



Win works on the shelves. 143269



Dry goods manager and second in charge Jason Addicott, store manager John Iramiyan, Honh Zhang, Erika Jones from AMES, Shuling Rong and Win Maw. 143269

refugee in 1978. "I was very welcomed," she said.

She said the Noble Park Coles store's work experience program and tours helped her students to increase their vocabulary and learn about products, employability skills, communication and occupational health and safety.

"It reinforces what's learnt in the classroom," she said.

"They really grow in confidence."

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