

All in a week's work

It is an ordinary, inner city primary school. Yet Sarah speaks of it as a hall of champions. That's the beautiful thing about listening to this teacher describe a typical week teaching Year 5 Green. She has a talent for affirmation. The stories of this child or that – uplifting, sad, funny or poignant – tumble out like a haphazard assortment of precious stones gathered from the earth; rough and grainy to touch, yet the makings of fine jewels.

Two of the children are from recently placed refugee families. How two youngsters battling language barriers and traumatic memories from a war zone can make such academic progress amazes Sarah, as does the little girl with the hearing impediment. 'These are fantastic kids,' Sarah glows. 'Their determination is inspiring.'

Then there's the twins. The fact that they get to school in the mornings is more a tribute to their own motivation than adult supervision. At home, Mum is not quite stable. In Sarah's most recent conversation with her she was muttering something about the CIA coming to 'get' them. The children will often arrive late and lunch-less, but they get there.

Another 'little trooper' (as Sarah refers to him) was playing up terribly on Tuesday. His father had shot himself that very morning. Such incidents don't shock Sarah. Distressing family

troubles are sadly familiar and even part of her own childhood history. In hindsight, Sarah's adult decision to apply for university was a courageous step, a challenge to her lack of confidence and to her family's expectations. In their eyes Sarah would always be a barmaid in a country town. She has a raw sense of the hurdles these children negotiate.

The school is in a rough part of town, I muse. A rough school? Sarah disagrees. 'They're not rough kids. They're gorgeous kids. I just love 'em. It's just that they've got a lot of challenges to cope with.' She laughs suddenly. 'The other day...'

And she's off again with another anecdote. This time an account of their school passion play. Apparently the boy playing the part of Jesus on the cross met with a technical glitch as the chair he was standing on keeled over. Bravely he carried on to the end of the play, only to burst into tears as the curtain fell. 'But Miss, I was so good in yesterday's rehearsal,' he sobbed into Sarah's consoling arms.

And on another day: 'Somebody stole ten dollars from my desk. I gave the class a very stern lecture and pointed out that I had no money to buy my lunch that day. Two students approached me later. Informants? No! They knew nothing about who stole the money; they were just very concerned about my lunch and offered to share their sandwiches with me. How generous is that?!'

And so the stories roll on. For Sarah it's all in a week's work. Her care for 'her kids' is a joy to behold. I am not sure she is aware of how good she is and the priceless education these children are receiving. They have a teacher who loves them and believes in them. Another champion in the classroom of 5 Green. •

