Teacher’s influence will be sorely missed

By CONOR BYRNE and TAMARA HOWIE

THE school term will begin with heartache and loss for the Mainingrida community.

Emma Bell had been teaching at Mainingrida College for 18 months before her life was cut short aboard MH17.

“There’s not too many dry eyes in Mainingrida,” said college principal Stuart Dwyer.

“She was a person that created really positive relationships with the community where she worked. Because of the respectful person she was she developed some really robust and respectful relationships on the homelands. That resulted in amazing attendance rates.”

Ms Bell was travelling back to Darwin after holidaying in Europe ahead of the school term, but tragically will not be walking into a classroom of smiling faces tomorrow.

Mainingrida College staff will instead be remembering her bright spirit and having a wellbeing day.

“Everyone out here is quite sad and devastated about what happened,” Mr Dwyer said. “It’s like losing a family member.”

Ms Bell taught 25 students from years one to eight, of all abilities, but her influence reached far beyond just those in her Outback classroom.

She spent time learning local languages from her students.

The passionate educator inspired the kids to think creatively and engaged her students by working with youth organisation Corrugated Iron, who did a lot of video work in the area.

“The kids saw how exciting those projects can be. Not just in Mainingrida but far out in the homelands,” Mr Dwyer said. “She was a very amiable person. She had the attention of her students all the time.”

Ms Bell’s mother Barbara plans to visit the devastated community to connect with those who loved her dearly.

Condolences have come from far and wide with support for those at Mainingrida College.

“The Police, the AFI, the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, the amount of people who’ve sent in condolences has been incredible,” Mr Dwyer said.

Many also took to Facebook to express their grief and remember Ms Bell.

Bernie Rose Wardaguga Nethercott posted: “Mainingrida community have lost a friend, a hero, an angel and will be missed so dearly R.I.P. Emma Bell.”

Trisha Mchwan posted: “Very sad to hear. Emma was a wonderful teacher and friend. Thinking of her and the other family sadly affected by this terrible loss.”

Vig Hughes said: “RIP Emma you will be missed by many including the students you have crossed on your teaching career.”

Heartbroken dad told: She’s on the bombed plane

By DANIEL KNOWLES

A BRISBANE father has told of the terrible moment he received a text message telling him his daughter was aboard the doomed Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17.

Devastated dad Paul Bell has appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin to declare a ceasefire with Ukraine to allow relatives to retrieve their loved ones, including his daughter, 30-year-old Territory-based teacher Emma Bell, who worked at Mainingrida.

Mr Bell, 57, said he was in a business meeting on Friday when he missed a call from his son, and then came the devastating text message: “Emma was on the bombed flight,” the text from his son said.

“The hardest part is you imagine burying your parents, not burying your children,” Mr Bell said last night.

“The Department of Foreign Affairs has said it may take months to repatriate our loved ones.”

“I don’t really care about the war between the Ukrainians and the Russians, but I would love to have my daughter come home.”

“I have lost my daughter. “She was only 30 years old. “She was one of the most beautiful people you could ever know.”

He said she had been working in Arnhem Land where she travelled between three schools, including one which was “no more than iron sheets over four posts”.

Mr Bell said his daughter had also planned to spend 12 months in Africa.

“I was more concerned about that trip than a trip to Amsterdam,” Mr Bell said.

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