



Pakenham Secondary College student leadership co-ordinator Laura Henderson and local Bendigo Bank branch manager Norm Davidson are tremendously proud of the efforts of local youngsters Jenna Douglas and John Langley. 159914 Picture: RUSSELL BENNETT

# Awakening new leaders

By Russell Bennett

A LIFE-CHANGING leadership camp has helped to inspire the next generation, with a pair of Pakenham Secondary College Year 9 students learning a series of incredible life lessons from their time at 'Camp Awakenings' in Beaufort.

As part of its annual involvement, the Pakenham branch of the Bendigo Bank sponsored the two students - John Langley and Jenna Douglas - during the last weekend in August.

Branch manager Norm Davidson said the sponsorship was part of their commitment to empowering young people in the Pakenham area.

"The camp provides its participants with a supportive environment to grow and develop," he said.

"We want to give our youth the best opportunity so they can become the next generation of leaders in our community. Camp Awakenings is focussed on building support networks for the participants through friendship and trust."

Pakenham's support is part of an ongoing partnership between the Bendigo Bank and the Rotary Youth program, Camp Awakenings, with sup-

port from the Rotary Club of Aspendale.

As part of the partnership, 30 Bendigo Bank branches sponsored 56 students to attend the camp at the Cave Hill Creek campsite at Beaufort.

Camp Awakenings director Michael Weiser said the camp runs over three days and focusses on students with leadership potential.

"During this time, the students participate in team-building activities, as well as attending various sessions and presentations on youth-related issues," he said.

"They are challenged physically, mentally and emotionally through the program.

"Through self-belief, self-respect, a positive attitude and motivation, the participants develop and harness methods, tools and skills to counter the challenges faced by today's youth.

"All participants learn and benefit from the camp in their own unique way."

John said the camp was one of the best things he'd ever done in his life.

"It's shown me how easy my life really is compared to other people's after all the stories that the leaders told," he said.

"There are people in a much worse spot than you are - that's the major thing I got out of it.

"You may not get the same things that I got out of it but if you've got something you could change, go for your life and do it.

"For me, personally, it was one of the best things I've ever done.

"I made a mate in the first five minutes when we turned up to go on the bus to get there, and I made another friend about half an hour into the drive.

"I still talk to them - it's really good."

Jenna said the camp had taught her a new perspective.

"I know a lot of people have got something out of it," she said.

"I went through the Facebook posts weeks after the camp and all my friends from the camp have been posting up about their days and how much they miss it. It was just so exciting to see and I want other people to share that same experience."

For more information about Camp Awakenings, visit the website at [www.campawakenings.com.au](http://www.campawakenings.com.au).