

Foster's high-profile support for public education

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He made his name representing Australia on the football field, and now former Socceroos player Craig Foster is kicking goals for teachers and students as a champion of public education.

As a talented midfielder, Foster donned the green and gold jersey 29 times between 1996 and 2000, and since retiring from playing professionally he has embarked on a football broadcasting career with SBS. An outspoken crusader for social justice and equity, the 50-year-old addressed the Public Education Foundation Awards in May with an inspiring speech lauding the value of public education.

"I'm a very strong believer in the value of education as a basis for creating the life every young person dreams of," he told the audience at Sydney Town Hall. "It's a basic human right and it can only be articulated in society through a well-resourced public education sector.

"While choices are laudable and important, the foundation of any successful society must be that every single child ... has the choice to attend an outstanding public school with well-paid and highly respected teachers, adequate infrastructure and a long-term commitment to sustainable growth.



"I believe in the right of all children to an outstanding free education as an enabler and a leveller that reflects the fact we're all equal. An education must not be a factor of socioeconomic standing but exactly in spite of it."

Foster, who went to public schools in Lismore, NSW, said his "hard-working" educators were not just teachers of the curriculum, "but in life".

"[They] believed in going the extra mile," said Foster. "They knew the power an education would provide me and others - either those wishing to remain in the country and make a contribution socially, or others with dreams of playing football for Australia and of one day being able to use that platform to give back to help people and society, which I'm privileged to be able to do today.

"I remember with incredible fondness my teachers who impressed on me the importance of education in alliance with sport, and who gave me a vision of what a post-sport career might look like - including being up here today working for a multicultural station [SBS] and having a platform to be able to help vulnerable people."

Touching on his role in the rescue of Hakeem al-Araibi - an Australian footballer of Bahraini descent who was detained upon arrival in Thailand last year after Bahrain issued a red-notice arrest warrant to him for being a dissident, as part of a crackdown on pro-democracy athletes - Foster urged students to help others seek a better life.

“I believe everyone has the right to a safe environment, a safe country, and the same opportunities for their children as we’ve been given,” he said. “The Save Hakeem campaign was not just about helping one young Bahraini. Far from it. It had wider implications for a country such as ours that’s been struggling so badly to agree on, and implement, a humane asylum-seeker policy framework. And the attendant, or we might say underlying, public discourse that respects all and refuses to demonise any section of the community.”