

**Submission
No 15**

VOLUNTEERING AND UNPAID WORK PLACEMENTS AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW

Organisation: Schools Industry Partnership
Name: Mr Ian Palmer
Position: Chief Executive Officer
Date Received: 16/02/2014

Subject: Volunteering and unpaid Work Placements in NSW

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Sun 16/02/2014 12:47 PM

To: Childrens Committee <Childrens.Committee@parliament.nsw.gov.au>

Dear Chair,

I wish to submit the following thoughts for the committees deliberations.

Service Learning

The positive benefits of volunteering are well documented, but not always well promoted. Furthermore schools are stretched for time and resources to enable them to take full advantage of the learning opportunities associated with volunteering.

Thoughtful design of the volunteering opportunity can improve learning outcomes in school. For example students would be very proud if they volunteer to clean up the local creek.

However if the students were then to write a report on their findings, include pie charts of the waste sources, and deliver a PowerPoint presentation to local authorities we have optimised the learning outcomes.

Service learning in NSW schools has been sidelined for years and needs revitalisation. Maryland Department of Education in the USA has the most effective Service Learning program of all those I have explored.

Work Experience

Work Experience is currently to hit and miss. Some students find it a very worthwhile program which helps them explore career options and decide on subject choices.

Others are in schools that provide little structure or direction, other than telling students to find their own employer and fill out the forms. Whatever happens in the week is left purely to chance.

While most employers are well intended, many think their role is simply to baby sit the students with menial tasks to keep them occupied for a week. In the worst cases the

students learn the wrong message: work is boring – *no wonder mum and dad don't do it.*

In the best cases, the employer is groomed by the school or a service provider to partner in the work experience process.

Individual students may have special needs or development goals. Eg: let's work together to try and build self-confidence or employability skills during the placement.

Work Inspiration

Work Inspiration is a campaign backed by the Smith Family, Foundation for Young Australians and NAB, with the support of the Federal Government's School Business Community Partnership Broker Program. Work Inspiration targets employers and aims to turn Work Experience into Work Inspiration. Employers are coached to use three learning insights aimed at helping the young person better understand themselves, the wealth of career opportunities in the business, industry or region, and how a good education is the foundation of a successful career. The Partnership Brokers program is actively working with the DEC Vocational Education Directorate on this positive initiative.

Work Placement

Often confused with Work Experience, Work Placements are industry based training placements linked to a formal program of study. Students are expected to demonstrate they can apply their classroom learnt theory in real work conditions.

Some courses make the placement optional, while others make it a formal obligation of the course. Sadly most businesses are unable to support student training, meaning it is a constant effort to recruit, nurture and retain quality training workplaces.

NSW DEC address this challenge through a network of Work Placement Service Providers. WPSPs are NGOs that coordinate up to 60,000 placements across NSW for Year 11 and 12 Vocational Education students.

These placements are monitored to ensure they comply with the formal agreements and structured nature of the program. Surveys show approximately 26% of students are invited to apply for a job with their host employer.

Regional training awards contribute to recognition of the quality of learning and support of employers.

Equity and outcomes

Prue Huddleston, The University of Warwick in the UK, has researched work based learning programs. Critically the research shows that opt-in style programs do not reach the students that need the most help to develop positive skills and attitudes to work. Keen and confident students may volunteer with little encouragement, but adolescents from jobless families, or with other barriers typically require a more strategic and structured approach.

Schools often embed time in the workplace as part of the course design. However what happens in the workplace is too often left to chance. Education and employers need to redouble their efforts in genuine partnership to prepare tomorrows workforce.

I analysed 49,704 placements and found a very high attrition rate of employers. Almost half that stopped taking students did so after just one placement, rising to 64% by their 3rd student. The evidence is clear that employers do not generally find students helpful, and struggle to spare the time for supervision and training. The good news is that many other employers appreciate the benefits of such programs, as they may have participated in younger years. These employers make up the backbone of the volunteer supervisors and trainers that are the real hero volunteers in our education partnerships.

One of the most frequent challenges reported by host employers is how to motivate students. Praise and encouragement are common strategies, although in a few cases students gain a false sense of their value to the workplace.

It is understandable that some students feel learning only occurs when they sit in rows inside a classroom. Yet for many students hands on learning is truly empowering. A good teacher can help the student reflect upon their time in the workplace, and unpack the range of tasks undertaken. In doing so students discover the complex set of skills that have developed from work placements and volunteering: problem solving, planning and organising, communications, initiative and enterprise, teamwork, and many more.

Further support.

I apologise to the brief nature of this submission and offer to expanded upon any point should it prove of interest to the committee.

Yours Sincerely

Ian Palmer

Ian Palmer

CEO

Schools Industry Partnership

Serving Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Penrith Regions

[Redacted signature block]

IMPORTANT: This e-mail, including any attachments, may contain personal, confidential or privileged information. If you are not the intended recipient, or if you have received this email in error, please contact the sender immediately and delete all copies of this e-mail and attachments. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, reproduce, disseminate or disclose any part of this e-mail or attachments.