Figtree High School

GenZ-2Work - Opportunities for students through collaboration with local businesses

Context
Figtree High School is a large comprehensive school in the Wollongong area of NSW. The school has 1,037 students, including 26 per cent of students from a language background other than English and 5 per cent who identify as Aboriginal. The school has a Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) rating of 89 (2014/15 average).

Enhancing community consultation
The school sought a working relationship with the local Westfield shopping centre to develop programs to further support Stage 5 (Year 9 and 10) students with career options. Members of the school executive team prepared a detailed proposal that they presented to the management of Westfield Figtree and Warrawong. The proposal included opportunities for school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, work experience, goal setting and individual mentoring from business representatives from a wide range of professions, and details of communication with families. Following negotiation with Westfield management, a strategic plan was developed. The plan involved:

- a partnership agreement between the school and Westfield signed at the launch
- students developing the program name of GenZ-2Work
- keeping staff, students and parents involved and informed with regular updates
- school-developed teaching resources and lessons on job applications, the selection process and resume writing
- an authentic job application process with 40 students applying for 22 places
- interview panel experience with panel members from Westfield, Workplace Learning Illawarra and Figtree High School.

Achievements
The school formally evaluated the program which included a survey of participating students, their parents and businesses involved. It found:

- an increased awareness among students of the wide range of job opportunities in a large company from human resources to legal, marketing, building, maintenance and sales
- increased interview and curriculum vitae writing skills for all Year 10 students
- improved student employability skills including high standards of behaviour and presentation
- over 50 per cent of participating students secured part-time or casual employment at Westfield
- increased work experience opportunities, school-based apprenticeships and traineeships
- greater opportunities for one-on-one mentoring from successful local business people
- increased student aspirations for all, as well as enhanced motivation for less academic students
- 100 per cent of students, mentors and parents recommended the continuation of the program in 2016
- success stories on social media, including Facebook, encouraged parents to provide positive feedback.

Sustainability
Westfield Figtree has recently been acquired by the Blackstone group, who remain committed to the continuation of the partnership. The current GenZ-2Work program will be adjusted to suit the needs of the new student cohort and businesses at the newly named Figtree Grove, proving the sustainability of the partnership. A team from the school will ensure the program’s sustainability in the event of staff changes. The program will continue to run as a partnership with representatives from businesses and the school working collaboratively to give students opportunities, confidence, experience and valuable connections beyond the school setting.

For more information on Figtree High School visit their website.