

2015 Grow Wellington Work Inspiration Pilot – Case Study

Pilot background

Work Inspiration is an interactive work exploration model for school students and employers. The model aims to make young peoples' first experience in the workplace more meaningful and inspirational in order to raise their ambitions and aspirations. Work Inspiration is an employer-led initiative, offering an opportunity for students to learn about employment in a way that is unique from other, more traditional, work placement opportunities.

In 2015, Careers New Zealand (CNZ) acquired the licence to deliver the Work Inspiration programme in New Zealand. In preparation for rolling out the programme across the country, CNZ successfully trialled the approach twice with Westpac Bank in Christchurch. For the third pilot of the programme, CNZ worked with Grow Wellington to deliver Work Inspiration in Wellington. Grow Wellington approached Positively Wellington Tourism and Positively Wellington Venues to take part in the pilot. Rongotai College and Wellington East Girls College agreed for their students to participate in the pilot, with fourteen of their students participating. Through the pilot programme, Grow Wellington, Positively Wellington Tourism and Positively Wellington Venues provided opportunities for the young people to learn about different employment opportunities in their organisations.

The programme

The schools varied in the processes they used to select the students, due to variation in school roll sizes. Although the schools varied in the processes they used to select the students, the individual students selected for the Wellington Work Inspiration pilot were perceived as reliable and willing to take part in the pilot activities.

The Grow Wellington Work Inspiration pilot took place over three days and included various activities and resources. All students received the Work Inspiration toolkit¹, a collection of workbooks which provided guidance for the placement as a whole as well as exercises for students to complete. As part of the program, the students interviewed various staff members from across the organisation to learn about their individual career journeys and about their role.

At the end of the project, all students gave a presentation to the other participants, their families, CNZ, their school careers advisor and employers, outlining their ideas to support business growth in Wellington.

¹ The workbooks were: Insight 1, Insight 2, Insight 3, and a student placement book

Key Successes of the Grow Wellington Work Inspiration Pilot

Allen + Clarke² were contracted to undertake an evaluation of the pilot to identify what worked well in the Grow Wellington Work Inspiration Pilot to inform and support the nationwide rollout of the programme. Key successes of the pilot were:

Students developed confidence

Students had developed or built confidence as a result of participating in the Work Inspiration pilot. Generally, students were more confident with public speaking and talking with groups of people. Students built their confidence in the programme by interacting with adults, including staff working at the senior level such as Chief Executives, as well as delivering their presentations to adults at the end of the Work Inspiration placement. Employees, parents and careers advisors observed students' confidence levels grow over the three day Work Inspiration experience.

One parent believes that talking to adults can be frightening for young people. His daughter was shy when meeting new adults. At Work Inspiration, she had the opportunity to talk to adults, including Chief Executives, and interview the employees. Her father said he saw her confidence grow at the end of each day of the Work Inspiration pilot. After Work Inspiration, she is visibly more confident when talking to adults she previously hadn't met.

Students learned about themselves enabling meaningful career-related choices

The different parts of the Work Inspiration Pilot helped students learn more about themselves. This included becoming more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and understanding their personalities. Students improved their sense of self, and as a consequence, were in a better position to think about where they wanted to go. The organisations also recognised the value in teaching students that careers are not always a linear process, and that students recognising that there are many career paths encourages students to accept the different career paths that are available.

Through her involvement in Work Inspiration, one of the participating students gained a much better understanding of work conditions and environments that would work well for her.

² Allen and Clarke Policy and Regulatory Specialists Limited, trading as *Allen + Clarke*

Employee morale was raised and business relationships established

The cluster approach to delivering Work Inspiration supported building business communities between the three organisations. The Chief Executives of the organisations discussed their organisations as well as further developing the newly strengthened relationships. Employees also mentioned the importance of local organisations giving back to their communities, and enabling young people from the community to learn about local work opportunities and develop pride in Wellington.

Employees felt pride in their professions, remembered the importance of their professional journey, and felt how valuable their daily routines can be. An employee noted: *“Giving people the opportunity to tell their stories - It’s really empowering”*. A careers advisor also developed a sense of value in their professional contributions to student excitement and success.

The Work Inspiration pilot provided an opportunity for professional appreciation, supporting employee morale. One employee saw a shift in attitudes, from first explaining a technical role, such as computer programming and coding, to then highlighting how this role is evident in our everyday lives. The employee felt pride when she saw students discussing the role and reflecting on what had been shared.

Students learned about working in an organisation or company

Students gained a deeper understanding about different careers and organisations. The information included different job roles and responsibilities, how careers can progress and what the inside of various workplaces looks like. Staff and parents noted that students demonstrated their understanding of business through the ideas shared in their presentations. The students found walking along-side staff, seeing them in their role and environment, rather than hearing about the positions through traditional instruction as the most beneficial part for developing their understanding.

The real-world, “authentic experience” of Work Inspiration helped students see where they can end up, giving them inspiration to choose subjects and work hard in school. Careers Advisors noted that other programmes that the students participate in, such as taking them to tertiary providers to hear about subject selection and careers, do not have the same effect. The advisors believe that this active participation and real-world experience provided an added impetus for success for their school’s students.

Students enhanced key workplace skills

Students developed useful workplace skills during the Work Inspiration programme, including how to present ideas to groups, how to work within a group, how to ask questions in a professional way such as interviews, as well as thinking and presenting their ideas quickly and in a way to get their point across.

A student watched everyone doing their part, and 'seeing it all come together' to support a shared purpose. She recognised that effective teams have individuals working towards a goal, and each member is important to achieve this goal.

Schools were able to provide a work experience opportunity for Year 10 students

Work Inspiration had a positive impact on the participating schools, as it made it easier for them to participate in work experience, and opened up opportunities for students that were not previously available to them. Students said that the experience would support them in selecting their school subject courses for the following year. School staff and parents recognised the value in this opportunity, particularly at a pivotal point in the students' education journey – before they begin their selection of subjects for NCEA.

A Careers Advisor reflected on the unique work experience opportunity, which was not available to his school's Year 10 students. The Advisor said the Work Inspiration pilot provided his students with a greater understanding of the variety of jobs, which he believed is particularly important before they chose their NCEA course subjects.