

Work Inspiration Case Study: The Smith Family



1. Pilot Name and Location

The Smith Family pilot was located in their Brisbane State office and included a one day visit to services.

2. Lead Employers and their Purpose

The Smith Family is a national non-government organisation and a founding partner of the Work Inspiration campaign in Australia. Their mission is to provide education opportunities for financially disadvantaged children and their families. The purpose of the pilot was to model how the Work Inspiration program could best meet the needs of such young people, and then relay their findings to interested partners.

The Smith Family were also keen to pilot an approach to 'work experience' that might convey a sense of excitement about multiple pathways for students – perhaps more effectively achieved than through the traditional work experience model.

As a national partner, The Smith Family was keen to experience firsthand the benefits and challenges of implementing a Work Inspiration program for lead employers.

Arup, a major corporate partner of The Smith Family assisted with the pilot as part of their community social responsibility program.

The contact person for this pilot is Julie Bell, Senior Partnership Broker Manager at Julie.bell@thesmithfamily.com.au

3. Students and Schools Involved

Twelve students in years 9, 10 and 11 from Glenala State High School participated in the pilot. Each of these students were currently receiving a 'Learning for Life' scholarship from The Smith Family. The nature of the target group of students was consistent with the aims of The Smith Family.

4. Partnership Brokers and Evaluator

The pilot was implemented by a team of staff from The Smith Family, with some assistance from Arup. The team was led by Julie Bell and included Simon Gregory (Partnership Broker team), Megan Dodd (Strategic Partnerships Manager) and Jane McKibben (Learning for Life Worker). They were responsible for providing the data and insights for an insightful video which documents the pilot. It was produced by The Smith Family and is available on YouTube on the Work Inspiration Australia page.

5. Pilot Summary

After an internal 'Big Conversation' process in which various staff were introduced to Work Inspiration, the core Work Inspiration working group shaped an internal program and determined how they could make their contribution.

The three day event was held in late March 2013. Twelve young people participated in a series of activities and conversations – including a site tour, personality profiling group talks, career conversations in pairs or one-on-one, and interviews with employees, and the creation of career boards about those staff members. On the final day, the young people presented their findings and learning to the Brisbane office staff of The Smith Family.

While covering the Three Insights, wherever possible, students who had identified their personality style shared that information with an employee who identified with a similar personality style. The overall theme of the program was that all personalities and working styles are valued in the workplace, and that is what creates effective teamwork.

Before and after the three day program, The Smith Family communicated with parents/carers of the students involved in the pilot. The Smith Family Learning for Life workers sought support and feedback from those parents.

6. Key Successes and Success Factors

- ▶ Students enjoyed meeting the staff members, and hearing about their career experiences. References were often made by the young people about how they had appreciated the range of interactions and conversations that were on offer – a key goal of the pilot set by The Smith Family.

"What I most liked was meeting people, lots of people and hearing their stories. I now feel I'm not alone and there are lots of pathways possible." (Students)

- ▶ An average score of 4.4 was compiled by the students about the success of the program in meeting their expectations and this high scoring was supported by a 4.3 score from the employees of The Smith Family.
- ▶ 100% of the twelve student evaluations stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the Work Inspiration pilot had helped them to think about a career, to learn about how careers develop, and to increase their awareness of options. 90% stated that Work Inspiration had not only encouraged them to develop aspirations and set goals, but that they would recommend Work Inspiration over traditional work experience. 80% stated that the program had increased their motivation to do well at school. The Smith Family and Arup employees experienced a vibrant 'feel good factor' when they listened to the presentations of the students. Simply put, they found it a joyful experience to share their career journeys with the students; the same young people that their organisation were supporting in their programs.
- ▶ 100% of the employees who offered feedback to the program strongly felt that it was both worthwhile to their organisation and that they

would recommend it over traditional work experience. 90% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt the program should become an integral part of career development for students, that young people seemed encouraged by the range of options, and that the Three Insights helped to facilitate their career conversations.

- ▶ The success can be explained by the commitment of a youth friendly agency and national partner in Work Inspiration piloting the program. The Smith Family was keen to test an approach to work experience that offered excitement and ownership. Group work methods that are so relevant in such youth orientated organisations formed a key part of their pilot program – small group career conversations and team presentations. Peer support was a key element for this group of disadvantaged young people to participate and learn.
- ▶ Partnership Brokers within The Smith Family were able to use their skills to engage staff in shaping a 'great program'. Given the target group, the responses by both the young people and employees are most encouraging. As stated by more than one employee "it was a positive experience for all".

7. Key Learnings

For next time: local application

- ▶ Reshape the initial sessions so they focus upon team building and engage the students immediately, and/or do this in a pre-day 1 event.
- ▶ Be more open with the students about the Learning for Life scholarships that have been awarded to the students and explain how the Work Inspiration program complements and reinforces their participation.
- ▶ Seek a closer partnership relationship with the school, including a lead-up and post program, so that students can get the full value out of their learning. Other Queensland pilots have indicated that fully engaged teachers can see how Work Inspiration can contribute to such key initiatives as SET planning, VET subject placement selection.
- ▶ **And most importantly** – value the parental engagement process within this pilot program. Feedback from parents was extremely positive, and reinforced the work of the Learning for Life program.



8. Special Feature

- ▶ Given the established relationship between The Smith Family and the families of the twelve students through the Learning for Life program, The Smith Family communicated with the parents and carers of the students and received very positive feedback about the impact of the program on their children.

"My girls had a great experience and they were really proud of the poster and career board that they produced – in fact one of my daughters stuck it up on her wall and has kept it there".

- ▶ This reinforced the quality of the existing relationships between the scholarship provider and these disadvantaged families.
- ▶ A parental engagement strategy, even one as simple as involving parents and carers in the evaluation of the program is worthy of serious consideration.
- ▶ There is also real value in youth services, development agencies and service providers piloting programs within their own organisation.

9. Recommendations to National Partners

- ▶ That the evaluation strategy of Work Inspiration incorporates a parental engagement process. It should seek their feedback on the value and future of the program and how they may help communicate this to other potential employers.
- ▶ That youth services providers (including schools, colleges/training organisations, employment agencies and youth development), and partnership broker/coordinator organisations be encouraged to pilot the Work Inspiration program within their own premises. This may help them to better promote the concept to the employers from whom they seek support and/or collaboration.

10. Reflecting Upon the Evaluation

The video is clear in its messages and powerful in its impact. It can be accessed on YouTube at the Work Inspiration Australia page. The documentation of the pilot is excellent, featuring the employer and young people. Any future documentation could further showcase the role of education as a stakeholder and even as a critical partner – especially when the students return to school and continue to deal with the challenges of family poverty or disadvantage.

