

Schools focus on academia, not trades

Taranaki Futures

A Taranaki educationalist believes schools need to do better for their non-university bound students.

The Coordinator of Taranaki Futures, Warwick Foy, says secondary schools must provide equitable opportunities for a wider range of students than they do at present.

"We structure our schooling around academic kids yet only about 29 percent of them go on to university," he says. "And then too many of them complete varsity with a hangover, a \$40,000 debt and a non-vocational degree."

"They're leaving school and going to university for the experience, not the qualification."

Warwick Foy has long believed that schools "aren't good enough in providing information about trades related courses and employment opportunities in the community."

"We simply don't celebrate these learning styles."

He's therefore welcomed the Ministry of Education's Trades Academy structure and Vocational Pathways initiative so much so that, as a senior teacher at Inglewood High, he's been seconded to Taranaki Futures to establish the Skills Squad Trades Academy in the region.

The 2014 project for Skills Squad is called 'Build a Bach'. It's a collaboration between secondary schools, industry and the Trades Academy at the local polytechnic, Western Institute of Technology (WITT).

The project, which has attracted 19 students from five partner schools, requires them to work with an architect to design a bach and then, in the second and third terms, build it to industry standards.

"We intend the bach to be completed by the end of the year and then sold to kick start next year's project," Warwick says. "In doing so students will get tutoring and supervision, hands-on experience, and a passion to take up a trade."

* This image represents the Construction and Infrastructure pathway only.



*I like being practical.
Building skills will
set me up for life.
My path is Orange.*

At the moment the students attend Skills Squad one day a week but, from next term, they'll be fully engaged building the bach before returning to school for the final term with credits towards their NCEA Levels 1 and 2 with a Vocational Pathway.

"We have a structure where a tutor provides the hands-on and a coordinator, the pastoral care. We're careful to treat them as adults," Warwick says.

Next year is looking bright with more Taranaki schools interested. Using the Vocational Pathways, the Trades Academy can create a wider range of programmes to provide the practical learning opportunities.

One Year 12 student who's enjoyed the hands-on experience is 16 year old Dylan Green from Inglewood High.

"I sort of drift in the classroom. It's hard to focus at times," Dylan says. "But I'm good with my hands and I like seeing things develop from scratch."

He spoke to Warwick Foy when he was still teaching at Inglewood High and Warwick suggested he should try the 'Build a Bach' project.

Dylan contributed some ideas towards the layout of the kitchen but, when building begins, he wants to construct the walls. "I enjoy putting pieces of wood in place," he explains.

He has responded favourably to the Skills Squad environment. "They treat you like adults and let us give our opinion." Dylan says.

The programme has also shaped Dylan's future and he's keen to return next year. "I didn't know what I was going to do but this has opened doors for me to get a job. It's been life changing."

He may be building a bach this year but in 10 years' time his horizon will be significantly bigger. "I want to construct a warehouse," he says.

More than 4,200 senior secondary schools students, from 264 schools are currently enrolled at a Trades Academy this year, in 22 Secondary-Tertiary Programmes throughout New Zealand. Using the Vocational Pathways, students can plan their options from learning to earning.

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