



Project Report

2006 Victorian Equity Projects – An Office of Training and Tertiary Education initiative

Project title	Work Experience - Certificate I in Vocational Preparation
Organisation/lead agency	University of Ballarat, TAFE
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Project summary

TAFE Pathways customised and marketed the Certificate I in Vocational Preparation course to single parents and mature age (45+) students who were interested in preparing to return to the workforce. The course focused on employability skills, personal development and included one week of work experience.

The learners

The target learner group was single parents and mature age students (45+) who were eligible for the TAFE Pathways Program and interested in preparing to return to the workforce. A total of 15 students were in the class of which approximately half were single parents and half mature age.

All of the students were female (no male applicants) ranging from early twenties to mid fifties. Most students had some, albeit limited, work experience however many of the mature age group had been out of the workforce anywhere from 6 to 20 years. The mature age students were most interested in increasing their skills so that they could secure entry level jobs, with the consideration of possibly continuing on to a higher certificate level course. Some of the single parents however were considering higher education levels of study as a long term goal.

The challenge

The course provided students with the knowledge and skills to consider a broad range of possible employment opportunities and build confidence to participate in work experience. It was anticipated that the inclusion of work experience would give the student an opportunity to attain insight into a particular career pathway and either re-affirm or revise their decision. Additionally it was desirable for the students to gain skills that would prepare them for either immediate employment or for further study. The course therefore offered a number of units in computer skills as well as a Food Handling and First Aid certificate.

University of Ballarat TAFE's approach

The course was structured and units dovetailed to prepare the student to participate in work experience; scheduled approximately half way through the course. Field trips, motivational speakers and various analyses of workplace expectations were included in pre-work experience preparation.

All students participated in a computer based career counseling session (Career Voyager) so as to broaden their areas of consideration. After evaluation of possible career options, the students were placed in work experience that provided them with a direct, hands-on opportunity to participate in the industry of choice.

It was stressed to the participating host employers that the students did not have industry specific skills and the work experience was more an opportunity to observe, ask questions and participate under supervision.

The results

Including the Practical Placement in the course gave the students first hand experience of expectations in the workplace. This defined the vocational nature of the course and kept the focus on realistic rather than aspirational career pathways.

The inclusion of units that addressed personal development was crucial to the success of the Practical placement in that it gave the students the required confidence to participate. The course was structured with sufficient hours built in that if a student did not feel confident to do the placement they could withdraw from that unit and still receive their certificate. All students however chose to participate.

Lessons learned

Due to students coming from varied backgrounds, the early challenge in the course was to unify the group. The "Managing Personal Change and Personal Effectiveness" units facilitated open discussion and focused on personal development and confidence building. This fostered a sense of comradeship amongst the students.

It was important to explain to the host employer the nature of the course and a brief description of the students i.e. Out of the workforce for some time, no specific training etc. This provided the employer with a clear understanding of expectations. Feedback from employers revealed that they appreciated the early establishment of a close working relationship with the University of Ballarat through the pre-work experience visits by the TAFE Pathways Officer and Course Coordinator, and the follow up contact visits by the teachers.

With this particular target group it was beneficial to have a coordinated team approach between teaching staff and support workers. As many of the students had complex and sensitive personal issues it was important to provide a supportive and non-threatening environment.

Contact details for queries regarding the project

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