

**Submission
No 7**

VOLUNTEERING AND UNPAID WORK PLACEMENTS AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW

Organisation: Career Links
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Mr Andrew Cornwell MP
Chair - Committee on Children and Young People
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Andrew

Submission re: Volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in NSW (Inquiry)

Career Links Background Information

Career Links is a community focused, not-for-profit organisation servicing Newcastle and Lake Macquarie. Operating since 2000, we manage and facilitate a range of programs and initiatives which connect young people with business, education, community and families. We help to create links and opportunities for young people to be their best.

The Structured Workplace Learning program (SWL) provides advice and support for students throughout the work placement process. Our Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) team has successfully delivered work placement programs to the NSW Department of Education, Catholic School's Office, Australian Independent Schools and Hunter Institute of TAFE in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie since 2000.

This service supports the majority of students who complete Vocational Education & Training (VET) as a requirement of the HSC to complete approximately 70 hours (2 weeks) of industry placement over 2 years.

Now in its 14th year of managing this service, Career Links has delivered over 30,000 work placements for participating schools within this time frame. Career Links is the linchpin in ensuring students are matched to dynamic and interesting work environments. The success of this program is the strong relationships with employers, nurtured by the SWL staff. Without these community minded businesses, young people would miss out on the invaluable experiences that work placement provides.

Please find below Career Links comments on the key points of the inquiry given our current role as the coordinators of mandatory work placement for HSC students and based on our strong relationships with local Schools, Business and Community Groups.

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Existing policies relating to volunteering and unpaid work placements

Positive aspects of the Structured Workplace Learning Program for students

- The SWL program provides young people with an insight into the 'world of work'. It is an opportunity for them to gain practical experience and build industry skills directly related to what they have been studying at school or TAFE. It also provides students with greater awareness into their career of choice.

Positive aspects of the Structured Workplace Learning Program for employers/industry from hosting students

- Participate in the education, career development and vocational training of young people in their community
- Talk to students about their industry, its career paths and future directions
- Promote the attitudes and skills needed in the workforce
- Identify young people with employment potential for their industry
- Strengthens their links with the community and raises their business profile
- Increases the supervisory, training and mentoring skills of staff
- Creates realistic expectations of the world of work in their industry
- Raises the quality of future employees entering their industry
- Opportunities to mentor and inspire young people.

Challenges the SWL Program faces in supporting students to complete mandatory work placement that may flow across to voluntary work placement.

- For a number of years now, but most notably since the increase in the school leaving age to 17 (2010), there are an increasing number of students that are deemed 'not job ready'. These students are unable to go out on work placement and as a result do not receive their accreditation certificate and may not receive an ATAR. This may be related to students not really understanding their VET subject selection and or the value of the work placement opportunity in terms of gaining skills, experience and possible employment at a later date.
- A proportion of students and parents believe work placement is 'slave labour'. This attitude may be contributing to the number of students that are deemed 'not job ready' and is likely to be similar in a voluntary work placement program.
- Access to transport to get to and from work placement can be a barrier.
- Access to quality employers prepared to share their time and expertise with young people can also be difficult. Expectations of both voluntary work placement participants and employers will need to be managed to ensure the future success of the voluntary work placement program.

Measures to encourage volunteering and foster opportunities for volunteering among children and young people

- Career Links run an annual Community & Work Placement Awards program that recognises and rewards the efforts of students and host employers. This generates significant interest at a school and community level.
- We thank all host employers with a Certificate of Appreciation to recognise their involvement in the Structured Work Place Learning program. The feedback from host employers indicates other than seeing young people grow and develop during the year; this is one of the most meaningful forms of recognition.

Best Practice in supporting and promoting safe opportunities for volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people.

- All students must complete accredited training in WH&S facilitated by their RTO eg: School/ TAFE or private registered training organisation. Generally, this is done prior to the completion of work placement.
- Some students must hold a White Card (Construction Induction) prior to work placement. The host employers give all students a work placement induction and interview prior to commencing their work placement.
- The SWL team are not qualified and do not carry out WH&S site inspections. The Registered Training Organisation delivering the subject does site assessments (not risk assessments).
- Depending on the age of the young people involved in the voluntary work placement program the NSW Working with Children Check may need to be completed.
<http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/Working-with-children/Quiz--Do-you-need-a-check>
- We send host employers a "Guide to Workplace Learning" which outlines that employers should have their own safe working practices implemented.

With our extensive experience in this highly specialised area, we would welcome the opportunity to participate in a working party or any other relevant activities to help create links and opportunities for young people to be their best.

Should you require any further information please don't hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED]

Yours Sincerely

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