Doxa Youth Foundation: Doxa Cadetship Program

www.doxa.org.au

Innovation

Doxa Youth Foundation has been creating education-based opportunities for young people since 1973. Three programs form Doxa's core activities: a camps program located at Malmsbury and the Melbourne CBD; a school in Bendigo providing an alternative education program; and the Doxa Cadetship Program. Collectively, these programs reach 5,000 Victorian children and young people (8-24 year olds) each year. This case focuses on the Cadetship Program.

The concept of the Doxa Cadetship Program emerged quite unconventionally after a series of meetings between prominent Melbourne-based businessmen in the early 1990s. Through these discussions, the development of the social and professional capital of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds was identified as a need to be addressed. The first intake of cadets was in 1993.

Through a recruitment process, talented young people are identified in Year 12. Recruits are provided with a suite of supports over a three to four year period to enable them transition from school to a tertiary and professional pathway. These supports include: a living allowance; a new suit (important for tertiary and employment interviews); a book allowance; professional learning (e.g. how to network in social settings); and eight weeks of an annual work placement, under the guidance of a matched

industry mentor. Through these combined resources, skills and experience, the Cadetship Program seeks to accelerate the development of each cadet to become a highly successful graduate.

Since 1993, 425 graduates have come through the program and now work as professionals in some of the largest companies in Australia and internationally.

Outcomes

Compounded or multiple layers of disadvantage can have the most dramatic effect on the educational potential of a young person. With this in mind and staying true to the original need for the program, Doxa's attention focuses on improving transition pathways to further learning and employment for cadets. Related to this, they also seek to improve a cadet's leadership, personal and social capabilities and engagement in learning. More broadly, the 'buy in' from business, philanthropy and, more recently, other collaborating not-for-profits, is believed as critical to the program's success. As such, community engagement from these perspectives is also an integral outcome area of focus.

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Examples include

Improving	What might help you notice whether improvements are being made? Through… Evidence and approaches, such as
Transitions further learning and employment	• Number of cadet graduates in full-time employment after program completion. • Comparing the full-time employment rates of Doxa Cadet graduates to the national full-time employment rates of non-Doxa university graduates. • Retention rates of cadets as they progress through university.
Student capabilities leadership	• Number of cadets trained and utilised as public speakers to promote the program at school and Doxa events. • Number of cadets specialising on higher profile projects within their sponsor company. • Number of cadets taking on community, training and leadership responsibility inside and outside of placement.
Student capabilities personal and social competencies	• Observing cadets at networking social occasions with business leaders. Immediately prior to the 'event', the cadets are coached in networking, how to introduce and excuse themselves to a person or group; asking questions and active listening. They then get the opportunity to immediately practice what they have just learned with the business leaders. • Participation in broader activities such as SRCs, sport community involvement. These are checked and encouraged from application and throughout cadet involvement.
Student engagement	• Involvement of alumni in current cadet program (e.g. as peer-to-peer guest speakers). • Ratio of cadet attendance at professional development camps, social events, participation in social media avenues and drop in rates at office.
Community engagement of key 'stakeholders' – e.g. business	• Retention of businesses year-on-year. • Number of cadets a business takes on. • Increased diversification of business involvement from individual sponsors to trainers, event attendees, in-kind supporters and financial program sponsors. • Champions spread – what starts as support from one champion spreads to other business units and in many cases becomes a whole of business partnership.

> They then get the opportunity to immediately practice what they have just learned

Lessons learned

Use of external expertise: The Cadetship Program is well established and the number of businesses and young people involved has grown. This could lead us to take a 'business as usual' approach, but we know that factors internal and external to the program won't necessarily stay the same. So periodically, we draw in external groups to work with us to ensure we are maximising the impact of our programs. For example, from a recent review of the Doxa Cadetship Program with The University of Melbourne, we now work with a group of not-for-profit organisations, including The Smith Family, Teach for Australia, Western Chances, Ganbina and Skyline. From another focused piece of research on the key development phases of young people by Regina Hill Effective Consulting, this has led us to rethink the age groups we work with (at the 'engagement and aspiration' phase of Year 9 students) and how we might do so. These investments in our own learning allow us to gather data *and* simultaneously see improvement opportunities that we might have otherwise missed. This is beneficial to Doxa, but more broadly to the collective impact we and other organisations can have on young people with tertiary potential.

Feedback: It is important to understand the needs of each supporter to maximise their experience. This is key to the growth and longevity of the Cadetship program. Our formal program design processes not only assist us develop relationships with our sponsor companies, but they also provide opportunities for gathering important informal feedback. We visit sponsor companies twice over the course of a year. These visits help us gauge company goals and methods of how they can be acknowledged for their efforts. For example, company A may wish to support young female engineers while company B may wish to support young people from regional Victoria. Knowledge of these goals has seen Doxa jointly win company awards, place media both externally and within the company publications and create opportunities for companies to use their expertise to train young people.