

## Design Thinking Work Experience Program

Mernda Central College: 19 year 10 students

Partnership: Whittlesea Tech School, HWLLEN

Host Employers: Big Group Hug, Enable, Hanson, Repurpose It, Whittlesea Food Collective, Whittlesea Y, Yarra Plenty Regional Library, Whittlesea Youth Commitment/HWLLEN.



### Context

In June 2024, Whittlesea Tech School (WTS) in collaboration with HWLLEN and Mernda Central College (MCC), delivered a pilot 'project-based' work experience program. This program was designed to enhance the student work placement experience by including real-world problem-solving challenge.

### Activities

Students from MCC undertook a 5-day work placement program from 17-21 June. The program was developed in collaboration with HWLLEN and MCC and involved a mix of days at WTS and one of eight local employers. The employers set challenges for the students to work on throughout the week and WTS supported students to address these challenges using a Design Thinking framework. The week culminated in a presentation afternoon where students shared their work with their employers.

The goal of the program was to:

- provide students with a work placement experience that taught them the process of Design Thinking and challenged them to apply it to a real issue or opportunity their employer workplace
- provide opportunities for students to develop key employability skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, initiative and enterprise, communication, teamwork, planning and organising.

### Outcomes

Program Strengths:

- High employer engagement resulting from the inclusion of a targeted challenge which provided a welcome focus for engaging students with employers and staff.
- High level of challenge for students – students were pushed out of their comfort zone to engage with business representatives and present findings as a “pitch” for the final session.
- Rich real-world work was engaged in by students for intensive capability development.
- All but one of the host employers attended the final ‘pitch’ session; most of the idea/solutions provided by the students were identified as being useful with some being implemented post the work experience program.

Program Challenges:

- Many students were keen for more time with their employers, while employers seemed comfortable with timing.
- Students who were expecting traditional work experience whilst onsite at WTS were not as engaged initially in the WTS program days and the project work.

### Feedback

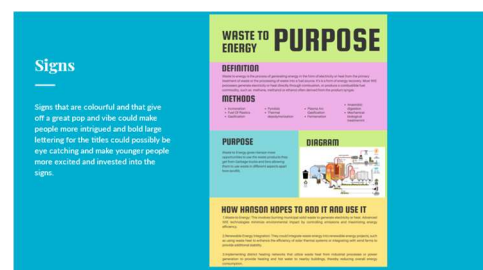
- Students identified that through this program they learnt about the design process and developed a range of personal and social capabilities.
- Many students identified that the program had influenced their career goals by showing options for work
- A large majority of students said they would recommend this program to peers.
- Employers reported that the most valuable part of the experience for students was building employability skills and gaining experience in the workforce.
- Employers reported high levels of engagement and were impressed with the outcomes of the challenges and the student presentations with ideas/solutions able to be implemented, at least partially, in their organisation.
- Employers loved the feedback loop of the final day presentations and suggested online link for their staff to view.

### Conclusion

Based on the data collected, there is a strong case for the continuation and further developing of this pilot program with opportunities to repeat and/or scale up program with other schools to be explored.

Student Interviews video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0vK7Z-6ESs>



Student work sample from students at Hanson