

ANNA BOOTH

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PARENTS AND CARERS GUIDE TO WORKPLACE LEARNING

Copies of the Guide are provided to parents and carers by schools and TAFE NSW institutes prior to workplace learning programs. Copies can be downloaded at https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/vetinschools/schooltowork/learning/index_learn.htm

Translations of the Guide in a number of community languages will be available in Term 2, 2006.

NAVIGATING THE WORKPLACE LEARNING JOURNEY WITH OUR CHILDREN

A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Anna Booth

Is there a parent alive who doesn't worry about how much they do for their children? We want to be there to help and support them but we also want them to build their own capacity for self motivation, organisation and resilience.

This dilemma is present in the transition from school to work as much as it is at any other time of our children's lives. Perhaps it is even more challenging than at other times, because we are more conscious than ever that they have to make their own choices and craft their own opportunities; and, as teens they often don't want us meddling in their lives. Yet we know this stage is critical for their future and we want to help. So what do we do?

I found the new booklet from the NSW Department of Education and Training, "Parents and Carers Guide to Workplace Learning" a great place to start (see box).

I always thought of "work experience" as an opportunity for a student to dip into an occupation they are thinking about before committing to it. Whilst it does serve this purpose, the booklet suggests many other benefits of workplace learning. The booklet expanded my understanding of the part workplace learning can play in a student's education and preparation for life outside school.

Work experience doesn't just fall into our laps – students have to go out and find the position. It really is like looking for a job! Whilst schools do have links with employers and can connect up students and businesses, students (and often, parents!) do need to make the right moves to secure the place.

The booklet explains some of the practical aspects of doing this – just how much we as parents do, and how much is left to the student, gets back to my opening dilemma!

The whole process is kicked off by the school advising the student when workplace learning is relevant to them. I found my son's school careers adviser very helpful in briefing the students and providing the names of employers who have offered work experience.

The booklet gives good advice about how to help students find a position and these are some of the steps I think can help:

- Identify the field(s) the student would like to try – the more passion the student has for the area the more effort they will put into finding a position.
- Make a list of organisations that employ people in this field – scanning the newspapers, using the internet or *Yellow Pages* could be useful.

- Think about all the people you know – and the people who know the people you know – and see if you can identify any connections with any of these organisations.

- Ask them for an introduction to ANYWHERE in this organisation. Don't be afraid to ask for help – and this is the point where a parent rather than the student might be needed.

- Once you have a contact, ANY CONTACT, put the request in writing (email, fax, letter) and your contact can pass it on the right person. This is a good opportunity for the student to make an effort – to write in their own words why they would like a placement in this organisation and field – the authenticity (as well as the clarity) of this communication is important.

- Be prepared for a knock back or no reply. It is a bit like a job application and this happens in real life so our children had better get used to it! Help them understand it isn't about them; it is about the organisation and its processes and needs. Resilience is important at this point because the student may have to apply to a number of places before one agrees.

- When you get an agreement, the paperwork set out in the booklet must be provided to the host employer – the school needs to know the student has a place and the host employer has to be clear about their obligations.

- If the position is secured some months before, it is a good idea to touch base with your contact in the organisation from time to time – people move on. Also you don't want to find the employer is no longer keen or, worse, has kept no record of the arrangement!

- To get the most out of the experience it is a good idea for the student to ask if they could come into the employer a few weeks ahead to find out what they'll be doing, what to wear, how to get there etc. Indeed, if the employer hasn't worked out a program and supervision for the student this will give them a bit of a prod to do so.

- At the conclusion of the period the student can demonstrate their gratitude for the opportunity and also build the data base of the school for future workplace learning positions by thanking the employer and introducing them to the school.

As parents we will have different views about the degree of help and support to give our children – so much depends upon the child's degree of initiative and organisational skills. Whether we choose to take a major role or prefer a light touch, this booklet will help parents and students alike navigate the important workplace learning journey.