

Smart Waikato wins New Zealand economic excellence award

Smart Waikato has come up trumps at Economic Development New Zealand's 2018 Excellence Awards.

The trust's Secondary School Employer Partnerships (SSEP), a region-wide collaboration involving 22 secondary schools, 2300 students, 110 teachers and 140 employers took out the *Best Practice in Collaboration (business, iwi, community)* category at the EDNZ Annual Conference Gala Dinner.

Smart Waikato Trust Chief Executive Mary Jensen says being acknowledged nationally for collaboration is fantastic recognition for everyone involved in the initiative, which connects Years 9 and 10 students with employers and introduces them to a wide range of careers.

"This is the culmination of a massive team effort from our region. An exemplar of what can be achieved when working with the willing towards a common purpose. It is people from all backgrounds and areas of society coming together that create better futures for others, both economically and socially, and collaboration through SSEP certainly provides an excellent platform for that."

Smart Waikato Chair Sarah Morton-Johnson said the national award recognises the collaboration integral to all the trust's initiatives.

"This award for the SSEP initiative celebrates not just the contributions of a range of stakeholders, but the value of working together and sharing a vision for successful futures for young people in the Waikato," she said.

SSEP has been developed by Smart Waikato over the last four years, beginning with a global literature search in 2015, a pilot of five schools in 2016, which has grown to 12 schools in 2017 and 22 schools in 2018, including rural, city, coast and full-immersion Māori schools. In 2018, 46 percent of 2300 students involved are Māori.

SSEP sees a range of employer partners working alongside teachers and students to create classroom and workplace activities that link curriculum to the world of work.

By creating stronger connections between education and industry, the goal of Secondary School Employer Partnerships (SSEP) is to improve student retention, achievement and education-to-employment transitions.

"SSEP is, in its nature collaborative and a shining example of how working together can effect positive change, strengthen the future of our youth and ultimately our region," says SSEP project manager Linda Nelson Caie.

"The success of SSEP would not be possible without the support of our funders and commitment of our amazing teachers and employers. By working together, these school and employer partners

have created some incredible learning opportunities for our rangatahi that are opening their eyes to the world and real career possibilities around them.”

Mary Jensen believes collaboration forms the basis of all economic and social development in our communities. She acknowledges that in a global setting, we are a very small nation, with small regions, and even smaller towns and our young people are very vulnerable in this fast-changing world.

“Young people and their schools need to be better connected into their communities and supported by them to develop a better context about the world around them and their futures.”

“I am so proud of Linda Nelson Caie and her team here at Smart Waikato who have achieved collaboration through SSEP on such a wide scale.”

Smart Waikato Trust is thrilled to accept this award and encourage other regions to join SSEP, saying “together we can create a national platform for genuine collaboration between education and industry that inspires our students of today as they transition into our workforce of the future.”

SSEP is financially supported by MBIE, the Mercury-Waikato Tainui iwi partnership, MBIE, Waikato Regional EDA, DV Bryant Trust, Glenice and John Gallagher Foundation, SKYCITY Hamilton Community Trust and Waikato Farmers Trust.

Recent results show having business people in the classroom and going out to workplaces has made 75 percent of students are more interested in the subject area. They also say it has influenced their future subject choices.

It has helped 79 percent of students to understand why they are studying the subject at school, helped 78 percent think about their future career, and increased the likelihood of 62 percent of students staying in the region when they leave school (2017 survey of 544 SSEP students).

The awards were held as part of the 2018 Economic Development New Zealand Annual Conference Gala Dinner on October 18 in the Bay of Islands. Sponsored by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, the awards celebrate and promote best practice economic development across New Zealand.

- For more information: <http://smartwaikato.co.nz/initiatives/ssep/>
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