

CONVEYOR

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Stepping up

by Fiona Cole

In 2011 Winstone Aggregates Otaika Quarry in Whangarei took part in a new local initiative to encourage more young people to pursue a career in Civil Industry and Infrastructure.

Named Youth Into Industry, the success of the programme has opened a new door into seeking employment in Civil Contracting for its graduates, and has also provided local

operators with a renewed confidence in finding quality candidates to refresh a rapidly shrinking industry workforce.



Youth Into Industry founder Alistair McIntyre with students at Otaika Quarry.



When local children's book author and champion for the Civil Contracting industry Alistair MacIntyre came up with the concept of Youth Into Industry, he saw it as some sort of first steps programme to open a new pathway for senior high school students into civil construction and infrastructure jobs.

"At one end of the spectrum were these young people who weren't doing so well at school and had no real idea what they wanted to do for the rest of their lives," says Alistair. "At the other end was an entire industry with an aging employment pool facing a shortage of skilled workers in the future."

A former contractor who suffered a major injury in 1986, Alistair always remembered the start he got in the industry as a boy, helping his Civil Engineer father and hanging around the men on civil construction sites after school and on weekends – something no longer practical with the strict safety policies in place today.

Since he created the popular Doug the Digger story books in 2000, Alistair has been touring New Zealand with his real live 'Doug' – a Cat 301.8 mini excavator – appearing at A & P Shows and industry events, as well as promoting literacy and numeracy in primary schools. He saw a gap from the primary aged kids making a better go at their 'paperwork' to get up close and have a go on the big machine, and the school leavers with no motivation to pass exams and look for gainful employment.

Before long Alistair had found the right people to make it happen. A three-day pilot scheme in 2010 got the ball rolling and in 2011 Alistair's team had created a more comprehensive version of the Youth Into Industry programme spread out over 26 weeks.

The programme was integrated with the Gateway Programmes already present in New Zealand High Schools, which operates as a work experience-like form of practical career guidance, helping to open up possibilities for teenagers and get a head start into their industry of choice.

“These boys have shown real commitment and aptitude. Yes, they still have a lot to learn, but the difference now is they are more actively engaging in the learning process.”



Students from three high schools in Whangarei; Tikipunga High, Kamo High and Whangarei Boys, started the expanded Youth Into Industry scheme in February, working towards the completion of 11 NCEA units that would count towards their future studies in a wide range of occupations.

Local industry operators such as Winstone Aggregates, Goughs, Hirepool, Mainfreight, Truck Stops and Fulton Hogan stepped up to provide equipment, manpower and open days for site visits.

Quarry Manager for Winstone Aggregates Otaika Quarry, Selwyn Dodd, remembers the site visit to the quarry, which took place early in the programme. “At this stage they were still quite fresh, and spent a lot of time looking at their feet,” says Selwyn. “They reminded me a lot of what I was like at their age; not really interested in school because I wasn’t all that good at it.

“I spoke to them about being just like them once, with no real prospects, and that now here I am with a Diploma in Quarry Management and in charge of Winstone’s second largest quarry.

“We took the students through the safety checks on some of the big machines we have here and gave them the induction programme we run for new staff,” says Selwyn, who believes there is real merit in introducing students to the industry this way.

“Unless you get a job in the industry through knowing someone, it’s hard to get in. Employers want someone with experience because taking on a complete newbie is a real risk.”

“They are stepping up as individuals, who will shake your hand, and look you in the eye when they speak, and that gives the employers in the industry the confidence to take a chance on them.”



Quarry Gardens, Whangarei.



Student Elemoni Moana (centre) with Alistair McIntyre (left) and Winstone Aggregates’ Selwyn Dodd (right).

“We try to eliminate a lot of that risk with our own training and safety protocols, and by buddying up the less experienced crew with an old hand who knows their way around the machinery and site operations.”

Much of the practical work for the Youth Into Industry programme took place at the former Hardie Bros quarry in Whangarei that is now the Quarry Gardens. The 25 hectare site was gifted to the Whangarei District Council by new owners Winstone Aggregates in 1976, and has now been developed into spectacular public gardens with walks and public spaces set among the sub-tropical plants that thrive in the region.

Whangarei Quarry Gardens Manager David Muir talks about the work the boys completed as part of their training. “They built a retaining wall, and resurfaced a section of road leading from the car park up to another level of the gardens,” says David. “We also set them the task of creating a rock landscaping water feature called The Rivulet, which is about 40m long.” The tasks set involved the use of a range of small machinery, and learning how to operate them safely and to good effect.

By the end of September, there were six students who stayed with the scheme right through to the end and passed all 11 papers, ranging from Level One Workplace Safety and Employee Timeliness through to Level Two Small Plant and Equipment Maintenance and Level Three Identification of Services on a Construction Site.

David Muir believes the Youth Into Industry programme has huge potential, and adds that the Quarry Gardens is committed to supporting the Youth Into Industry programme in 2012 and each year after that. “We will keep finding projects for them, either in the Quarry Gardens or elsewhere.”

Alistair MacIntyre has high hopes of seeing versions of the Youth Into Industry programme being run all over New Zealand. “What we have built here is something which could not only make a positive difference to the future of our youth, but also to the future of an industry that shows the willingness to support it.”



Winstone Aggregates

P0 Box 17-195, Greenlane, Auckland 1546

www.winstoneaggregates.co.nz

