

SWP FOCUS – WORKIN’ AT THE CAR WASH

Ask any senior student at Mater Dei, and they will tell you that one of their favourite parts of school is participating in the Structured Work Placement (SWP) program. Ask any of their parents or teachers, and they will attest to this being one of the most valuable experiences for students in Years 11 and 12.

The SWP program provides students with practical and relevant learning experiences via their HSC subject ‘Work and Community Studies’. The subject provides students with the skills, knowledge, understanding, values and attitudes required for employment, participation and independence in the community.

Whilst the community-based learning experiences with host employers are the most visible element of this subject, important school-based components of SWP operate in parallel to complement them. Students practice workplace skills in a supportive setting where they can learn comfortably and gain the confidence to take the leap into more independent scenarios in the community. These school-based supports are conducted in small groups, with familiar staff acting as supervisors in familiar environments, with medical and pastoral care and limited pressure; ensuring that students are equipped to succeed in more challenging environments.

The school-based SWP formats change from year to year, depending on the interests, existing skills and goals of current students. This year some of our students are operating a weekly car wash business in the Mater Dei carpark.

While learning to use a hose, bucket, cleaning chemicals, sponge, tyre-shine and vacuum may be somewhat useful in the future, the skills being learned are broader and more valuable. The car wash enables students to be increasingly and uniquely challenged each week in organisation, application of safe work practices, leadership, delegation, receiving instructions from



supervisors, problem solving, cooperation and teamwork. Many of these skills are honed in the classroom well before they step foot into the carpark! What matters is not the shining of tyres or the polishing of windows, but developing the social skills our students will need as employees in other workplaces.