



Case Study

THE PRIME MINISTER'S
COMMUNITY
BUSINESS
PARTNERSHIP



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Community and Business Partnerships Brokerage Service

Name of Community Group

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent Development.

Name of Business

Centre for Executive Development Pty. Ltd. (CED).

Partnership Description

The partnership is an excellent example of the corporate/community interface that provides an opportunity for practical corporate citizenship and also results in positive community outcomes. A symbiotic relationship exists where CED uses its expertise and contacts in order that Blackwood staff can do their job more effectively. Through CED, other corporations have become involved with Blackwood and feel a sense of ownership with an increased sense of corporate responsibility within the community.

Tell us about Your Community Group

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent Development: The Blackwood Centre for Adolescent Development is an early intervention setting for young people at risk. Working in this difficult and challenging area, Blackwood is one of Australia's most recognized and successful enterprises. The school is situated in a small country setting with four permanent staff working at the cutting edge of finding ways to constructively engage young people to be positive members of their communities. Blackwood was the first such organisation of its kind and the research and knowledge being gathered there is challenging many existing education and welfare paradigms in its approach to working constructively with young people at risk.

Blackwood takes in twenty young people from 12 to 16 years of age each semester. Each cohort comprises a variety of presenting behaviours including: depression; self harm; sexual and physical abuse; attention deficit disorders; and the like. Blackwood uses risk focused prevention techniques and a specially designed team building process to impact on negative or destructive behaviours.

Tell us about Your Business

CED: The Centre for Executive Development is an Australian based international consultancy to public and private sector groups in the areas of organisational and human resource development. Specialising in the design and facilitation of applied learning and development programs at all levels, CED also provides advice and assistance in matters relating to organizational and structural efficiency and effectiveness. CED, which is headquartered in Sydney, has 15 accredited associates in Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, New York and San Diego.

The CED client list is extensive, and services have been provided to Australian and international organisations in the following industry sectors: Financial Services and Insurance; Engineering; Management Consulting; Manufacturing; Natural Resources; Energy and Environment; Retail; Transport; Academia; Communications; and Government.

The Community and Business Partnerships Brokerage Service is an initiative of the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership administered through the Australian Government's Department of Family and Community Services.



This project is managed and sustained through Our Community, with its associate partners – the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Municipal Association of Victoria.

The average attendance rate at Blackwood is 94% and the young people gain a sense of belonging that continues for years after they have left the school. This association is evidenced by the significant number of students who regularly return to visit once they have completed the program.

Why did you want to become involved in a partnership?

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent Development:

Blackwood was the initiative of David and Julie Hayes who began with an abandoned primary school site with no water tank, books, tables and a \$30,000 grant. Driven by a vision and determination to succeed, we were so busy just trying to build, design, teach, and keep our heads above water, that seeking corporate help was the farthest thing from our minds.

Through a previous association with David Hayes, CED approached Blackwood when they noticed that the school had won a National Excellence in Teaching Award. Once contacted our resolve to create a setting of excellence was reinforced. The school is a partially funded State program and because it was the first of its kind it did not fit into any clear funding model which made every step a battle. From Blackwood's point of view we had nothing to lose. It was obvious that we could not continue to operate at a required and necessary level of commitment and excellence without burning out.

The Blackwood staff has always felt that CED had an affinity with, and an appreciation of, the difficulties that we were facing and of the type of work to which Blackwood was committed.

It was rewarding to see that CED took the time to be interested in Blackwood and what we were trying to achieve. CED did not want to interfere with how we did our job, what our philosophy was, or how we developed our program. CED was just focused on helping us to do our job better.

What were you attracted to when choosing your partner?

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent Development: Rather than CED actively choosing a partner, it is probably more accurate to say that Blackwood found CED. Having had a previous professional association with one of the school's principals, a chance reading of an interstate newspaper on the day that the National Teaching Awards were announced rekindled the

CED: The Blackwood business is full of integrity, meaning, purpose and positive outcomes. It can be stated without fear of contradiction that Blackwood makes a difference. Why wouldn't CED want to be associated with such an organization?



connection at a personal level. CED had a clear understanding of the difficulties and challenges of establishing something new within strict funding limitations.

CED also recognized the value of the ripple effect when trying to create change within an established system. As the partnership developed, it became obvious that the challenges faced by Blackwood and its hard working staff were no different to those facing many of the organizations with which CED was associated. However, it also became apparent that while many businesses are inevitably caught up in counterproductive and, at times, meaningless 'games' and activities, the positive outlook that was displayed by those staff and helpers associated with Blackwood, in the face of significant financial and operational difficulties was refreshing to see and humbling to experience.

Detail the first steps of the process of developing your partnership. Where did you start?

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent Development: From our point of view, CED was focused on what our greatest need was and initially this entailed impacting on the level of intervention we could provide. Once the program was polished and tight we then started to work on the physical resources on the Blackwood site.

CED: The first stage in developing the partnership involved our understanding of what Blackwood did, who they did it for, and what outcomes they were pursuing. Once that understanding was clear, it became easier to see where CED could utilise its facilitation expertise and corporate connections so that the Blackwood staff could concentrate on doing what they were good at.

The first project involved the establishment of an outdoor education program that has now become an integral part of the Blackwood experience. Next, several leadership groups were introduced to the Centre and raised funds that were used to purchase a range of educational and operational equipment for Blackwood. A number of individuals from these groups have continued their association to this day and one of the leadership group members was heavily involved in a major corporate working bee that transformed the Centre's physical appearance.



What have been the benefits – both short-term and long-term?

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent

Development: Working with kids at risk is an area that is usually fraught with burnout for the staff involved due to the nature of the work. This means that experience and knowledge is readily lost and the wheels are constantly being reinvented. Our relationship with CED means that we are now entering our tenth year in this field and have plans for another ten more.

CED challenged our way of thinking and its support has given us the confidence to approach our work from different angles challenging accepted educational practices and principles. CED's mentorship has continually motivated us to find the means to create and sustain a program that is demonstrating excellence in its outcomes for young people.

CED facilitated the establishment of an outdoor program and we have developed what is considered one of Australia's leading wilderness camps. This camp is one of the program's greatest catalyst for behavioural change. In order to fund two of these camps a year Blackwood and CED are constantly looking for sponsorship. Fourteen camps have been funded to the extent of \$280,000 and two hundred and eighty kids have undertaken the camp and benefited from its outcomes in the program.

Our relationship with CED has meant the difference between mediocrity and excellence. We don't believe that you could ever measure the benefits of the Blackwood program adequately for the young people who attend, their families and the communities that they live in. In nine years no young person has committed suicide, 92% of the young people are at school, working or at TAFE, and the body of knowledge that is being developed in our work is recognised Australia wide. The ripple effect of this little country setting has exceeded even our expectations.

It has been pleasing to see that Blackwood has not only survived, but has continued to set exemplary standards of teaching excellence and community leadership. While Blackwood does not pursue any explicit financial goals, it does form and influence young men and women who in turn have made, and will continue to make, a positive contribution to society and to their communities. In terms of short and long term outcomes, CED derives no tangible benefits apart from the almost selfish and vicarious pleasure from the success of Blackwood.

What contributions does your organization make to the partnership? (e.g. in-kind support, volunteers, membership on Boards etc)

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent

Development: CED has provided us with contacts that have enhanced the quality of the impact that we can make on young people. It has introduced us to people who have financially

CED: CED is involved with developing executives and their effectiveness within the workforce, Blackwood is about developing young people and their effectiveness in the community. Both of these involve the elements of team work.



supported Blackwood as well as those that motivate and inspire us. CED has mentored our development and has been a sounding board for the problem solving that is required when creating a program that has the capacity to create change. While the Blackwood staff are busy doing their job, CED has challenged our direction and thoughts for sustainability, challenging us to create a vision of the future.

CED has used the Blackwood staff to speak with corporations about the building of teams and the elements that make them work.

What have been the challenges?

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent

Development: The main task for Blackwood has been one of survival while maintaining excellence in teaching and youth leadership. Trying to do a difficult job in the face of continuous financial challenges is draining on the individuals involved and when one sees the outcomes that are generated by the school compared with the difficulty in accessing state funding programs, it is frustrating to say the least.

CED: As a small business, CED sees its role as one of facilitator and coach. The main challenge facing CED is to continue to assist Blackwood while developing its own business enterprise, but events occasionally transpire that lead to new initiatives and regular infusions of corporate interaction with the school.

What have been the lessons?

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent

Development: Initially we felt as if we had nothing to offer CED. We soon learned that our passion was contagious and that the people that CED brought us into contact with gained more than just a sense of corporate responsibility. What they gained was a sense of social belonging and empowerment which reinforced their commitment to their workplace.

CED: There have been many lessons of determination, persistence and optimism that have been delivered by the staff and students of Blackwood to CED and its associates. However, the main lesson for organizations that might wish to set up a similar partnership has been that with a little effort great things can be done. All that is required is the willingness to take the first step.

What advice could you offer to others thinking of forming a partnership?

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent

Development: Select a partnership that will give you the greatest impact for your efforts. You can decide to support a group that is dealing in a reactive fashion such as working with the homeless, or early intervention which is proactive, preventing kids from moving out of home.

CED: Make sure that the program you decide to support is effective and that their work has been recognized in some fashion. It is important to take your support seriously and responsibly. In supporting Blackwood, CED is part of the challenge that mainstream education and welfare groups have to prepare our young people to be effective members of the community. Thoughtful support can create positive change in our society.

What plans do you have for future partnerships – with either your current partner or with other organisations ?

Blackwood Centre for Adolescent

Development: Future plans for the Blackwood/CED partnership involve a continuation of the association with an aim of assisting future members of the Blackwood family.



Second, CED is pursuing the establishment of a corporate advisory board that will contribute advice and assistance with a view to the sustainability of Blackwood.

Third, it is vitally important that Blackwood be placed on a sound footing so that the current principles can begin to spend more of their time training and developing others to carry on their work, and less time on having to seek funds for their survival.

If you are willing to assist other businesses or community groups in advice on partnerships would you provide your contact details for others to talk through any questions they may have?

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