

# Taranaki Futures: Strong Employment, People, Communities

ADVERTISING FEATURE

## Separating fact from fiction in youth employment



Warwick Foy

Stories by Gordon Brown

Warwick Foy admits he loves going to work every day.

After 22 years as a secondary school teacher, he was earmarked for bigger things, but his increasing interest in careers teaching and guidance meant he was inevitably drawn into a role at Taranaki Futures.

Just three years later, Warwick is now the general manager of the organisation and says he gets huge satisfaction out of watching young people turn their lives around.

Don't get him wrong, he's no social worker; but the reality is that Taranaki Futures is helping plenty of young people to find themselves because they are able to embark on the career they actually want.

It also helps that it is one they are suited for, and that doesn't happen by accident.

The 30 per cent of school leavers going to university are well catered for, but for all the other career pathways, information has been limited.

That's why Taranaki Futures was established.

Many readers will be vaguely familiar with the name, but remain unsure of what it actually does. So Warwick explains just what the organisation does.

"Taranaki Futures works in the gap between education and employment. This gap exists because the worlds of education and employment are constantly evolving, so it is often hard for educators and employers to understand how their worlds can most effectively work together."

He points out this is a problem in most of the developed countries where youth unemployment is commonly four times the general rate of unemployment. This means employers are not always clear about what they need from education and Warwick

says the academic pathways are still seen as being of more value than employment-based pathways.

After all, 30 per cent of high school students go to university, but 99 per cent of people eventually go to work.

"We need to work with schools, education providers and the Ministry of Education to move the emphasis away from content and assessment to work readiness, job-seeker skills, health and safety, mental health and financial literacy.

"In other words, we need better alignment between education and employment. Education is not just about employment but employment is always about education."

Many young people leave school not being 'work ready' from an employer perspective, Warwick says.

"As a result, many make choices that don't suit them because of expectation and misconceptions. That, in turn, means many

employers are not well-prepared to take on young employees.

"Ultimately, this means that within Taranaki we are failing to adequately engage a large number of our young people which has consequences for them and the communities within which they live.

"So we all have a vested interest in ensuring our youth have every opportunity to find meaningful employment and we need to do a better job of demonstrating to them what those opportunities are."

Most young people have a limited knowledge of the scope of employment in the region. They think farming is gumboots and engineering is overalls, without seeing the many other skilled occupations and tasks that are involved.

"Taranaki Futures will be the catalyst to ensure educators and employers work together to fill that gap."

### Focus on Futures

**Taranaki Futures' vision: Strong Employment, Strong People, Stronger Communities.**

KEY GOALS:

1. To advocate for equality between academic and employment based pathways.
2. To inspire employers to think about, and articulate, the type of workforce they will need for their futures.
3. To support educators and employers to develop new ways of highlighting available pathways to young people.
4. Support educators to develop initiatives that ensure young people are work ready.
5. Support employers to develop their understanding of young employees so they can be more effective.
6. Ensure all young people are effectively engaged beyond high school education.



## Community understanding is key

Well-known New Plymouth businessman Graham Wells has chaired the Taranaki Futures Trust since it was established three years ago.

Not surprisingly, he is passionate about the work the organisation does in bringing together educators, employer organisations and whanau to demonstrate to the community just what can be achieved by school leavers without

necessarily focusing on having a high-level tertiary education.

"Please understand we're not knocking university; far from it, but there are so many ways that Taranaki people have proven they can be successful by following their passion to get an initial employment opportunity which has led to a highly successful career.

"While Taranaki Futures is perhaps best known for the high-school students building bachs, there is far more to the organisation than that, as you will read elsewhere on this page.

"In fact, you only need to read Steve Scott's story to realise just how little information and encouragement was

available for high-school students in the past.

"I'm very proud that the concept of Taranaki Futures has been actively encouraged and endorsed by a cross-section of Parliamentarians concerned with getting our young people working in the areas they are most suited and that, for many, is in the trades, cadetships or other work-based career development pathways.

"To that extent, I'd like to acknowledge Jonathan Young for his initiative and guidance in getting Taranaki Futures established, along with Steven Joyce and Hekia Parata for their support and encouragement and for Bill English,

Andrew Little, Grant Robertson, Chester Borrows and Barbara Kuriger for their positive endorsement.

The biggest thing, Graham says, is for the community to understand the concept that for people to be successful, they no longer need to follow that historical pathway of leaving school and going straight to university.

Graham encourages us all to have those 'dinner table' conversations about what career success looks like.

Successes that will contribute towards us having a strong, dynamic and caring community right across this special place called Taranaki - a place which we are so fortunate to be able to call 'home'.

## Team of trustees is making a difference

The Taranaki Futures trustees are a unique collaboration of commerce, education and iwi interests in the region.

All of the trustees give freely of their time and they know that their only reward is to be part of a governance group that is making a significant difference to the lives of many young Taranaki people embarking on their careers.

Aa Taranaki Futures chairman Graham Wells notes: "Anyone reading through the list of trustees cannot help but be impressed by their diversity and acumen."

Among the trustees of Taranaki Futures is **Steve Scott**. The owner and general manager of award-winning engineering firm Rivet, he specialises in doing projects many others say are impossible.

The most celebrated example is, of course, the Len Lye Centre. He won the tender to fabricate the 32-tonne, 14-metre-high, stainless-steel panels which encase the art gallery. Opponents and critics warned the spectacular stainless-steel facade would be a disaster but the dramatic finish Rivet managed to produce speak for themselves - to the point where many think the facade is the real star of the Centre. Steve is modest about his company's achievements, but admits he is absolutely committed to doing what he can to assist Taranaki Futures.

He says he first became aware of the concept of Taranaki Futures and its existence through an introduction from a secondary school careers advisor and the placement of a student with Rivet. He candidly admits he wished there was something similar when he was at New Plymouth Boys' High School. "I was hopeless at school. I enjoyed tech drawing, metalwork and rugby practice. I didn't know what I wanted to do - I just didn't want to be at school.

"When I was 15 I took a day off school and went hunting for an apprenticeship. I got myself the first apprenticeship I could and that's



Steve Scott wants to ensure today's students get the best advice and support in their career aspirations.

how I became an electrician."

Steve recalls guidance on possible career options for him was limited, to say the least.

"When I took my leaving notice to school, they took me to the headmaster's office. Tom Ryder said to me 'What do you think you are doing? You should stay on for another two years and go to university'.

"I said 'Have you seen my attendance record? Please just sign that and let me go.'" He did, and the rest, as they say, is history.

"That's the way it was," says Steve. "You went to university if you were bright. The trades were for those who weren't good enough."

Steve Scott turned out to be better than good. He recently celebrated 25 years since he established Rivet, but he always remembers his first years in the workforce.

"My Dad was a sheetmetal worker at Fitzroy Engineering at the time. He had a good workshop at home and we would spend a lot of time together doing sheetmetal working and engineering. That's where I got my love of the trades."

So what prompted Steve to agree to be on the trust, even though he is a busy man?

"Apart from wanting to ensure school leavers wanting to get into the trades get better guidance than I got, as an employer I want our young people to enter the work force 'ready to work'. A balanced trust of all stakeholders is required."

Looking back now, Steve acknowledges schools' attitudes towards the trades have changed for the better since his time.

"There are a lot more pathways in the school system today, but I would like to see more focus on what is expected as a new employee, and that they have to work their way to the top - it's not a given!"

His final piece of advice to any students thinking of pursuing a

trades career is one which comes from his own experience.

"It doesn't matter what trade skills you learn when you first leave school, a lot of the skills and thinking is adaptable if you wish to change career paths once qualified."

**Graham Wells (Chairman):** An experienced businessman, Graham is the managing director of the Taranaki-based Wells Group, an organisation he established in 1984. Wells provides services to a wide range of energy-industry organisations. Graham is also the former chairman of Engineering Taranaki Consortium, and is a trustee of Be Safe Taranaki and a member of the Business Leaders Health & Safety Forum steering committee.

**Mark Bowden (Deputy Chairman):** Mark is principal of Spotswood College in New Plymouth. He has a lot of experience in education and was the head of Opunake High School before taking over his present role at Spotswood College. He also chairs



Graham Wells



Mark Bowden



Cheree Menzies



Barbara George



Tom Cloke



Will Edwards



Dan Radcliffe



Martin Baker



Lisa Sammut

the Taranaki Secondary Principals Association.

**Cheree Menzies:** Cheree is the owner and general manager of Feats privately-owned learning centres which has campuses in New Plymouth, Stratford and Hawera. Feats provides comfortable and friendly learning environments to assist learners to gain foundation skills and entry-level industry qualifications for today's workplace. Cheree is also the chairperson for the Taranaki Tertiary Providers.

**Barbara George:** Barbara is the chief executive of the Western Institute of Technology Taranaki (Witt). Barbara was formerly chief executive of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. She is a graduate of Victoria University and holds a post-graduate diploma in business and a Masters of Business Administration degree in marketing management. Barbara is from Taranaki and is Ngāti Rāhiri.

**Tom Cloke:** Tom is an area executive with the Road Transport Association of New Zealand

(RTANZ), which exists to represent the views of the Road Transport Operators sector. Tom is also a councillor on the Taranaki Regional Council.

**Will Edwards:** Will affiliates to the Taranaki, Ngāruahine, Tāngahoe, Pakakohi and Ngāti Ruanui people of Taranaki. He has spent most of his adult life in the university sector as a student, academic and researcher. In October 2014, Will was elected onto Te Korowai o Ngāruahine Trust, the post-settlement governance entity for Ngāruahine iwi. He is currently director of Taumata Associates.

**Dan Radcliffe:** Dan is the founder of International Volunteer HQ, which recently won the supreme award at the TSB Bank Chamber of Commerce Business excellence awards. Dan runs his business out of New Plymouth, but is a global entrepreneur who was named the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year in 2014 and was inducted into the Ernst & Young World Entrepreneur Hall of Fame. Dan is passionate

about Taranaki having based his business here since day one.

**Martin Baker:** Martin is the Lower North Island general manager of Tegel Foods Ltd. His background includes human resource management. Martin was very much involved with the initial work Taranaki Futures undertook with the employer forums in late 2014 and the trust is fortunate to have his expertise, experience and forward-thinking approach on Taranaki Futures.

**Lisa Sammut:** Lisa is the Taranaki regional manager for the region's own multi-award-winning TSB Bank. She spent her professional career in leadership, including 10 years in executive positions contributing to the growth and success of a number of New Zealand sales organisations and financial institutions. Lisa has a lifelong passion for coaching conversations that help others find their most rewarding professional lives. She believes positive change comes from strong collaboration.