The significance of engaging community stakeholders in establishing, sustaining and furthering university-schools outreach programs: A case study of the LEAP – Macquarie Mentoring program supporting high school students from refugee backgrounds

Building mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders plays a crucial role in successfully engaging communities through university outreach programs. This is especially true when developing and implementing schools outreach programs that typically focus only on the school and university students as key partners. A new and innovative schools outreach program at Macquarie University has successfully engaged the wider community through collaboratively working with a range of stakeholders through the entire planning, implementation and evaluation phases. In keeping with the theme of community engaged learning, this program has provided high school students, Macquarie University students, school teachers, community groups and organisations the opportunity to engage in an exchange of lived experience and expertise, while meeting personal, social, and organisational needs.

In line with the recommendations of the Bradley Review of Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) and the Australian Government’s (2009) response “Transforming Australia’s Higher Education System”, Macquarie University is committed through its Outreach Strategy 2011-14 to “grow opportunities and pathways for potential students from underrepresented groups, grow Macquarie’s capacity to engage with a range of communities on outreach initiatives, [and] sustain relationships over time to ensure the best outcomes for all stakeholders”. Research has shown that parents and community play a large role in influencing education outcomes of students (Mapp, K. 2004).

The LEAP - Macquarie Mentoring program is a cornerstone initiative that addresses the systemic and social barriers that high school students from refugee backgrounds experience in accessing and succeeding in higher education. The program aims to build cultural capital and tertiary efficacy of students from refugee backgrounds. Using community workers to build sustainable relationships with significant community and government organisations (e.g. individuals, student clubs, parents and caregivers, refugee support groups and state government), has been fundamental to the success of LEAP - Macquarie Mentoring in South-Western Sydney high schools. This exposé will examine the role stakeholders play in outreach program development and its sustainability, and suggests the Macquarie Mentoring model as best practice for stakeholder engagement in schools outreach programs.

References:

Key Words
Community, stakeholder, relationship, mentoring, refugee, schools outreach.