



Keith Yardley in his temporary office in Christchurch.

Enterprise wins prizes

A Christchurch chartered accountant mentors award-winning secondary school students in business endeavours.

KEITH YARDLEY CA did not like the thought of eating his own cooking for five weeks, so he made a decision that ended up impacting a number of young lives.

He joined his daughter and wife on a school trip to India, and during a 30-hour train journey from Kolkata to Mumbai, agreed to a teacher's request to mentor students in the Young Enterprise Scheme (YES).

"There is nowhere to escape on an Indian train so it was impossible to say no," he jokes.

Yardley mentors boys from St Thomas of Canterbury College, which celebrates its 50th

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anniversary this year. He was a pupil when the school started, and later his son was also educated there. Yardley's connection with the school includes being a former Board of Trustees member, and former Chair.

YES students create a product in response to a social issue and donate any profits to charity.

"I see the most important role of the mentor as being that of encouragement. The boys are usually highly motivated and often need endorsement of their actions," Yardley says.

He attends their meetings as necessary, but the primary contact is through email.

"I ask to be copied in on all emails. By doing this you can learn a lot about the product development, marketing plans, financial issues and even the possibility of dissension within the team."

Yardley says difficulties arise when the mentor is aware the students are making a potential mistake, or heading in the wrong direction.

"I think they actually learn more from their mistakes so there is always a judgement call to be made as to when to intervene.

"One of the things I learnt from the first year is that ideas have a much greater chance of success if the boys see them as their own and can take ownership of them."

He says brainstorming sessions are important. Then often just a gentle nudge or suggestion is all that is required.

"This can be achieved by questions and challenging ideas that might surface. The teams like to use you as a sounding board or critic. By responding appropriately you can send them down a path."

He says the most rewarding thing about being a mentor is being party to the students' growth in maturity.

"This was particularly evident with the Oceanic Fusion team from 2010... They were doing things at the end of the year in terms of the presentation of their product and their ability to mix with adults that I would never have thought possible when we first got together."

The Director of Keith Yardley and Associates has been mentoring St Thomas' teams since 2008.

While in 2008 the team did not win any awards,

Yardley says it was a huge learning experience.

The 2009 team Decibel Control Systems developed a device to detect noise above a certain agreed level, powered by a solar powered battery. It won two national awards, including one for sustainability, sponsored by NZICA.

The 2010 team Oceanic Fusion was mostly young Polynesian men who created an organic soap made from a flower native to the islands, also winning two national awards.

Yardley unreservedly recommends mentoring "if people are interested in young people and take pleasure and pride in seeing them develop".

He says schemes like YES are important because statistics show about one in three New Zealanders are employed in the small business sector.

"This scheme allows young people to take part in an area in which they have a

very good chance of spending their working lives, while they are still at school."

It provides invaluable lessons for when they move into the workplace, including teamwork, he says.

"For boys at least, the element of competition is something that motivates and engages them. The learning process becomes easier and they have fun."

With the Third World in mind, this year's team has developed a device to convert energy from heat, solar or boiling water, to a cell that can provide electricity to power such things as light bulbs other electronic devices and cell phones.

Former Prime Minister Helen Clark will officially launch the product on 10 August.

Yardley says this group is very committed and extremely well organised, and includes a student who has won a place in the national Young Enterprise team.

The school has undergone disruptions

because of the earthquake.

While in terms of buildings the school is relatively undamaged, losses to the school community included the father of two senior students.

The college shared its site with Catholic Cathedral College, with the host school starting lessons at 7.30am and finishing at 12.30pm.

Yardley says this made YES meeting times more convenient for students to fit in around other activities.

His own practice, which he started in 1991, has also been affected by the quake.

"After the February quake the premises we occupied were in the cordoned area but not the red zone. This meant that access was impossible and we had to relocate in temporary premises."

Subsequent aftershocks mean the building now has to be demolished, but he has secured new, permanent premises for the firm from September.



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