

Students help create new life for old mine

Getting hands-on at an abandoned West Coast mine and acting for the good of the local community is all in a day's work for Tai Poutini Polytechnic (TPP) civil construction students.

Students recently took part in remediation work at the old Bellview Mine, alongside CRL Energy and a research team funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Using the project as a real-world case study, the students were able to learn remediation techniques from local industry leaders.

TPP Chief Executive Alex Cabrera says the partnership is a great example of the Polytechnic getting out in the community and supporting local projects and activities. "As well as delivering relevant, quality tertiary education that meets the needs of our students and local employers, we also have a role to play in support of the wider community – initiatives like this Bellview Mine project are a great way for us to do that," he says.

Lead tutor Tom Daly says the students valued the experience they gained working at the old mine. "Our students did everything from risk assessments to surveying, safety plans to hard manual labour," he says.

The project, which was completed earlier this year, included the downstream installation of five 30,000 litre containers full of mussel shells. The shells now filter and purify the water travelling from the mine into the stream. The students also tidied up the old coal refuge area, cleared an access road, carted gravel to the site and built support pads for water tanks.

The work has contributed to the mine's remediation in an area with significant natural and historical attractions, and substantial potential for tourism in the future. It also fits with TPP's new Ethical Framework, that introduces a philosophy of social responsibility to the work of the Polytechnic and makes it mandatory for the benefit of the wider West Coast region to be considered in all decision-making.

"As well as learning specific civil construction skills, our students have also taken on a sense of stewardship and responsibility towards the land. They truly enjoyed using their newfound skills to play a real part in the remediation and development of the area," says Tom Daly.

Student Metua Raui says he is looking forward to enjoying the results of their work in years to come. "It's going to be awesome later because the next step is to open this area up to walkers and mountain bikers, so everyone can enjoy this pretty special spot," he says.

Tai Poutini students regularly benefit from the Polytechnic's connection with its local community, which often extends to real world experience and liaisons with industry. In this case, students have worked alongside and been mentored by GH Foster Ltd, the Centre for Minerals Environmental Research, and CRL Energy.

CRL Energy General Manager Dr James Pope says the students' work was greatly appreciated.

“CRL and our collaborators O’Kane Consulting NZ Ltd, University of Canterbury, Landcare Research and the University of Otago really appreciate the support that provided by Tai Poutini Polytechnic. Their work on the ground, and contacts within GH Foster contracting, were essential in getting this project to completion.

“We had support from many other organisations as well including the West Coast Regional Council, DOC, Minerals West Coast, Solid Energy, MBC and MBD, it was truly a collaborative effort,” he says.

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