

Aiming high to change the world

A national not-for-profit is helping schools give kids the skills they need to change their world, their attitudes and their local community, writes ANNA KELSEY-SUGG.

Climate change, rising inequality of political extremism, nuclear threats. There's a lot to be concerned about as a young person growing up in the early 21st century.

"The world is at a bit of a tipping point," says Rachel Hinds, national program director of High Resolves – an organisation that seeks to equip young people with the skills to not just cope with these concerns, but to confront them head on.

Now in its 12th year, the national not-for-profit runs global citizenship and leadership programs for teenagers. The organisation is engaged – via its school incursions, teacher professional development and resources – with around 80 Victorian schools. That number is set to increase as the year progresses, which Rachel says is crucial to achieving their lofty goals.

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She hopes to do this by teaching students the skills they need to be



Students from Diamond Valley College and Vermont Secondary College taking part in the High Resolves leadership program.



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effective and purposeful global citizens, through programs around social justice, digital citizenship and collective action. Students are encouraged to believe they can truly have an impact locally and globally – and, indeed, that they have a responsibility to try.

Dandenong High School assistant principal Vicky Argyropoulos believes firmly in the value of this teaching. “This generation of young people are digital natives. They are going to have to be global citizens, citizens of the world. How are students going to pick up these skills if you’re not explicit about it?”

She says her school was interested in the “moral purpose” of High Resolves, which resonated with the values of her school. “We really wanted to get involved with this opportunity to enable students to be global citizens and also to feel empowered in both online and offline spaces,” she says.

Meg Bailey, leader for global citizenship and leadership development at Templestowe College, has a maths and science background, but also a personal passion for sustainability and human rights. She was drawn to High Resolves because she wanted to develop a better understanding of how to teach social action and social justice to students.

“Templestowe College is a really interesting, innovative school. I noticed it focused heavily on individualised learning and students being entrepreneurs, and I thought there was a bit of a gap in our curriculum about our place and our responsibilities as global citizens.”

She says the professional training offered by High Resolves helps teachers understand social justice and global citizenship, and how they can unpack that for kids at a grassroots level.

“It all starts at: what is a global citizen, what responsibility do we have as part of our community and as a citizen of the world, and how can I ensure that I live my life as a good person and impact on others to follow my lead?”

Rachel says real-life application of knowledge is central to the High Resolves programs. “If you can’t take those skills and apply it into real life, then the learning isn’t long term and you forget it.”

The organisation’s ‘Videos for Change’ challenge, open for entries from July, is designed to cement this link from the theoretical to the practical. Secondary students are invited to create a one-minute video about a social issue they’re passionate about, ending with a call to action. Winners will be broadcast on Channel 10’s *The Project* and share in a \$9000 cash prize. To help run the challenge, teachers have access to free resources and professional development.

School projects and activities are another real-life application of the program’s skills. Rachel offers one example of a school in western Sydney where students identified youth crime as a major issue in their community. “That’s a massive thing,” Rachel says. “How do you take this idea – we want to do something around

youth crime – and bring it down to something that students can actually enact change in?”

Students identified that local kids didn’t have a lot to do in the community after school and suggested a better park could help. “The local park hadn’t been upgraded in years – the basketball hoops were all trashed, the skate park didn’t work anymore. We said, well, that’s absolutely something we can create change around. So they lobbied their local council. They got a \$20,000 grant and they actually upgraded the park.”

Victorian schools are proving no less ambitious. Templestowe College students organised a bike ride from their campus to the city to raise funds for educational supplies to be sent to a community in Africa, while Dandenong High students visited and arranged activities for their local elderly community at a nursing home. Dandenong High has also organised a major annual event for Year 6 students from feeder schools so they can feel confident and familiar with their prospective school.

The programs impact at an individual level too. Rachel recalls delivering her first program – on ‘collective identity’, in which students explore race and identity – to a predominantly white school in Queensland. Students were asked for written reflections at the end of the session. “I was reading through them on the train back into Brisbane and I will always remember this: one Year 8 boy had written, ‘Before today I thought it was okay to be racist, but now I know it’s not okay and I’m going to try really hard to be different’.

“I think to have that sort of impact on somebody’s learned belief after one workshop really cemented my passion for High Resolves and I guess that’s why I’m still here five years later, because I see how it works. And that’s not a one-off; you get that at the end of every session. Students have a self-realisation about the kind of person they want to be.”

That kind of person, equipped with the skills and confidence to tackle issues big and small, external and internal, looks like one who will put their global citizenship knowledge to very good use. 

High Resolves is running EdSummit 2018, free for school leaders nationally, in Sydney on 9 August. Speakers from around the world will discuss prioritising global competencies and how to implement them in schools: www.highresolves.org/edsummit

For more information on Videos for Change – this year offering extra support for entrants from rural, remote and Indigenous young people – see: www.highresolves.org/videosforchange