



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

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### **‘Creating Pathways to Employment’ Pilot Program a Huge Success**

An Employment Pathways Program aimed at keeping young people in the Whitsunday region has proved an enormous success.

The VAK8 Program was led by Tourism Whitsundays, along with the Department of Education and Response Learning NQ, and entailed matching high school students with local tourism businesses to carry out work experience and study for a Certificate II in Tourism.

At the graduation ceremony on October 31, at Mantra Club Croc, 19 students from Proserpine State High School, Whitsunday Christian College and St Catherine’s College graduated from the pilot program.

At the ceremony, Kim Hargraves, Director of Training with the Department of Education & Training, thanked Tourism Whitsundays CEO Craig Turner and Corporate Services Co-ordinator Jasmine Kratz for their hard work and dedication to seeing the program succeed.

In all, 13 local tourism industry operators took on Year 12 students for 20 days’ work placement and Response Learning delivered the Certificate II in Tourism over 10 days in the training room.

The program has seen five students already offered employment in the region, prior to the completion of the program, so there could be even more jobs to come.

Tourism Whitsundays CEO Craig Turner said the program was developed after Tourism Whitsundays recognised that the region’s young adult school leavers, who were born in the Whitsundays, were being forced to leave the community to look for opportunities in other destinations.

“When you consider that we have one of the strongest tourism destinations in Queensland, it made no sense to us that these passionate advocates were leaving and going to work somewhere else,” he said.

“To have these people who have grown up here – they love the place and can engage with our visitors with firsthand experience and knowledge – is integral to delivering a genuine visitor experience.

“With the graduation now complete, the industry feedback is an overwhelming ‘yes’ to continue this program next year and this may in fact become a tourism initiative that’s rolled out across Queensland recognising the Whitsundays as a key partner.”

Tourism & Education Minister Kate Jones said tourism was the main driver of the Whitsundays economy and VAK8, which was an Education Department initiative, was helping train and employ young people locally.

“The commitment from the Queensland Department of Education was recognised after consultation with Tourism Whitsundays, who identified that school leavers were the future of the industry,” she said.

“By keeping young school leavers in region, and allowing them to transition from school to full-time employment in the tourism sector, they have the opportunity to be the industry leaders of the future.”

For more information about the VAK8 program please email Jasmine Kratz on [Jasmine.Kratz@tourismwhitsundays.com.au](mailto:Jasmine.Kratz@tourismwhitsundays.com.au)

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