

Vicinity Centres and Beacon Foundation

Partnerships for lasting impact on youth disengagement and unemployment



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Kris McKay, Partnerships and Business Development Manager, Beacon Foundation

Vicinity Centres (Vicinity) is one of Australia's leading retail property companies with over 60 shopping centres and more than 1,300 employees, in six states, across Australia. Vicinity's aim is to enrich the communities in which it operates by strategically supporting issues that impact both centres and the communities around them.

Investing in their communities

Vicinity has identified youth unemployment and disengagement as an important community issue that also impacts on the amenity and performance of their centres. It's additionally been identified as an area of focus where the business can make a meaningful difference through its day-to-day activities.

Yeshwant Mudaliar, Sustainability Manager Community, at Vicinity Centres said, “Young

people who are disengaged can sometimes cause issues at our centres, and finding work can give them a greater sense of belonging, participation and acceptance. It's an opportunity for us to create shared value for our customers, retailers, the local community and most importantly our business – it's win-win”.

“We want our team to have a strong community focus, and access to programs which they can engage with. It gives us a sense of pride working for a company that supports the communities around us,” Yeshwant said.

In 2017, Vicinity established a targeted community investment program to collectively address issues of youth unemployment and disengagement at a corporate level as well as at its centres. The next step was finding the right charitable organisation to partner with.

Tapping into Good2Give's Advisory services

Vicinity tapped into Good2Give's expertise of Australia's not for profit sector to find the right partner to help deliver their community investment program.

"Good2Give helped us to introduce workplace giving through their technology platform in 2017, and we have raised over \$50,000 for over 100 charities to date (as of February 2019). We also used their advisory services to help us select, establish and manage a national corporate community partnership, to ensure our chosen partner was well aligned with our community focus and the partnership was set up for success right from the beginning," said Yeshwant.

"We decided to work with Good2Give because of their extensive knowledge of the not for profit sector, specifically organisations working to alleviate our social issue of choice, as well as their experience in helping to set up successful partnerships between corporates and charities," he said.

Beacon Foundation (Beacon) was chosen through a competitive process which included assessment against key selection criteria, managed by Good2Give with input from Vicinity. A three-year partnership was established, with bespoke projects to be rolled out to help alleviate youth disengagement and unemployment.

Established in 1988, Beacon's programs mobilise secondary schools, parents, businesses and communities to work together to support young people into employment by making school more industry-relevant and engaging. Beacon operates in disadvantaged communities and areas of high youth unemployment.

With programs at secondary schools in proximity to Vicinity's network of centres, the partnership allows Vicinity staff to get involved in Beacon programs and inspire youth to successfully transition from school to employment.

Kris McKay, Partnerships and Business Development Manager at Beacon, says that within a short time frame (two years) the partnership with Vicinity has already delivered some impressive outcomes. Vicinity has supported Beacon through;

- Annual financial contribution, allowing Beacon to resource programs and build organisational capacity
- Co-designing and delivering a bespoke mentoring program called Vicinity Uncovered that gives students a behind the scenes peak into Vicinity's operations
- Delivering a bespoke shopping centre design competition that fostered group collaboration and innovation for students
- Inspiring students through volunteering in our programs
- Fundraising and advocacy on a national scale through the establishment and delivery of the 'Light the Way' initiative
- Hosting programs on-site at shopping centres and corporate offices, offering students a unique insight into the sector
- Offered several work experience opportunities for students across the country
- Vital fundraising through workplace giving

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Successful partnership, measurable outcomes

Good2Give's National Community Partnership Framework gives Vicinity and the Beacon a rigorous process within which to work.

It is a living document that lasts for the duration of the partnership and allows both organisations to set agreed expectations, determine mutual outcomes and measures of success, as well as update one another with agreed work plans. It also enables them to manage expectations around reporting.

"From the outset, both Beacon and Vicinity set realistic targets in terms of staff engagement and hosting of Beacon programs. The framework enabled a structured approach that successfully captured the key impact areas and subsequent KPIs. Consistent review through scheduled meetings between Yeshwant and

myself ensured key learnings were understood and best practices from across multiple states and locations were shared.”

“The National Community Partnership selection process Good2Give ran for Vicinity resulted in a partnership being formed between two very aligned organisations in their efforts to alleviate youth disengagement and unemployment. Our alignment allows us to sufficiently resource and deliver programs across the country at Vicinity locations (and online) with Vicinity volunteers. Together, we have reached more than 1,500 students, increasing their aspirations and equipping them with skills that will help them make the successful transition from school to employment”, said Kris.

From Vicinity's perspective, the Beacon partnership delivers three important outcomes. It allows Vicinity to create positive connections with local youth in our communities. It's a key driver of employee value proposition, as our teams can play a part in shaping stronger communities through various skilled volunteering opportunities through the partnership. And, it raises the profile of Vicinity as a company working to tackle the issue of disengaged and unemployed youth in our local communities.

“Good2Give took the time to understand our business and helped us to find the best charity partner through which we could deliver our community investment program. Good2Give were considered, measured, knowledgeable and objective when giving advice – we would have no hesitation recommending Good2Give to others.” said Yeshwant.

Building on a strong foundation

Most Vicinity centres maintain close connections with Beacon's schools – where possible – to address youth unemployment and disengagement. Looking ahead, Vicinity plans to continue expanding their support programs for local youth, with Beacon and other youth focused local charities.

“We will do this through our company-wide community investment program to achieve a collective, greater impact,” said Yeshwant.

“We've learned a lot on our journey with the Beacon and are proud of what we have been able to achieve in such a short time,” he said.

His advice for other businesses looking to establish a community partnership?

“Make sure there is a strong alignment to what you want to achieve and what your potential partner can deliver. Charities, especially smaller ones, deliver community programs in specific ways, and it's unreasonable to expect them to change how they work for a corporate partner. Also, we would encourage corporates to establish a framework, with KPIs, through which the partnership's success can be measured so all parties are clear from the beginning on the partnership objectives.” said Yeshwant.

And for charities looking to establish a community partnership with a business?

“Although there can sometimes be a perception that corporate organisations operate in different ways to non-profits, both share a commonality in having a mission. Once you establish mission alignment, you are then able to collaborate and find effective ways to support each other in achieving the respective missions. I think it's crucial that during the planning stage, both parties are transparent regarding resourcing, capabilities and key priorities. The partnership with Vicinity has been built on transparency, clear expectations, tangible targets (that continue to grow as we gain momentum), and a genuine willingness to understand each other's mission and priorities” said Kris.

“Personally, it has been a pleasure to establish and grow the partnership since its inception and we are excited to continue to grow our reach and impact in partnership with Vicinity.”

**For more information on Good2Give services,
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