

Creating generational change

ABCN are crossing the
digital divide to address
social disadvantage



Call for change

What makes people successful? Intelligence? Hard work? No. Social background is the main predictor of educational and professional success – especially in Australia, where the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged schools is unusually wide.

This is the issue Accenture's not-for-profit partner, the Australian Business and Community Network (ABCN), is working to address. ABCN brings businesses and schools together to ensure students from low socio-economic status schools have access to the same opportunities and mentoring that those from more privileged backgrounds take for granted.

ABCN connects professionals from member companies to help disadvantaged students – who may not have industry connections or role models with degrees or corporate careers – to understand their career opportunities, raise their aspirations, expand their networks and build the skills and mindsets they need to succeed in the working world.

For 16 years, ABCN's life-changing mentoring programs have been delivered face-to-face in workplaces. But, in 2020, that was no longer possible. Pandemic restrictions made fostering connections between mentors and students more important than ever, but now these exchanges had to go digital.

ABCN was better prepared than most. In the 18 months prior to COVID, Accenture had worked pro bono to help ABCN define and build a digital strategy to envision how to grow its impact to 15,000 students by 2023. In 2019, Accenture had also designed and prototyped ABCN's first fully digital mentoring experience – ABCN GOALS – and tested iterations with students to validate the desirability, feasibility and impact of this new way of interacting.

As a result, 2019 had seen ABCN successfully conducting two pilots of the GOALS program. But, ramping this up to a mainstream online offering in 2020 required a pace and scale of change beyond anything ABCN could have imagined possible.

“Helping ABCN to build their capacity to scale and raise the aspirations and skills of more students is what our Skills to Succeed initiatives are all about. It's important to give kids mentors and show them the immense value they can offer the world, regardless of their background.”

JULIE LONG

Corporate Citizenship Lead
Australia & New Zealand



When tech meets human ingenuity

ABCN and Accenture teamed to drive a rapid digital transformation, including creating new digital programs to keep mentors and students connected. The fact that GOALS was scalable proved invaluable when COVID-19 hit, lockdown came into full effect and kids were unable to return to schools.

As wellbeing became a major issue during lockdown, a pro bono Accenture team ran a three-week project to design, test and deliver different concepts for engaging students in isolation ensuring they still felt connected. Accenture helped to define the digital experience and product strategy from how video content should look, to the interactions and journeys for mentors and students. In a matter of weeks, ABCN was able to launch the resulting inspiring video-sharing initiative – [ABCN Connects](#) – where professionals at member companies offered stories of motivation and hope to young people struggling in lockdown.

Teachers used ABCN Connects to encourage students to keep thinking about their future, resulting in fantastic feedback from the 6,000+ students viewing the videos. Most importantly, the ABCN staff involved in the accelerated projects were able to immediately extend their new learnings and tools across all their other digital transformation initiatives.

For example, Accenture had previously given ABCN seed funding to create a new program – My Career Rules – with a facilitated panel of professionals taking questions from groups of students. This was originally envisioned as a hybrid in-person/online offering. But now ABCN had the skills to adapt this program to be 100% virtual while still retaining all its elements of fun, spontaneity and interaction, enabling 582 students to participate remotely in the program during 2020.

When tech meets human ingenuity

“Previously, we were not a digital organisation. Now, every single program manager and facilitator can deliver a complex program online. It’s exciting! It means we can reach students we never could have before. We wouldn’t have been in such a strong position without Accenture’s groundwork and support.”

PETA MAGICK

Head of Program Development, ABCN





A valuable difference

Supported by Accenture teams, ABCN has accelerated its digital strategy, moved its mentoring programs online and launched new, fully digital programs. In 2020, the not-for-profit was able to fast-track its previous work with Accenture to deliver 179 digital mentoring programs.

ABCN's digital transformation means it has the opportunity to offer a wide range of support to regional, rural and remote schools, including a dedicated program offering for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, creating hope in marginalised communities.

Importantly, with ABCN using Accenture's human centred design process, student and mentor satisfaction metrics are equivalent or better in digital versus the face-to-face programs. This has given ABCN the confidence that digital program delivery can be a pivotal growth lever.

ABCN has transformed from a pure face-to-face mentoring approach, to providing a digital service that puts it on track to reach its target of 15,000 students by 2023. Having digital skills means ABCN can change more lives, helping disadvantaged young people to gain confidence and exceed their potential. More young Australians will be first-in-family to complete Year 12 or attend university – breaking the cycle of disadvantage, closing the gap and creating generational change.

A valuable difference

“We’ve learnt a great deal. Accenture has accelerated our digital transformation by about five years, giving us the skills we need to futureproof our organisation and help many more students, including in regional and remote areas.”

ALLEGRA SPENDER

ABCN Chief Executive Officer

179

Digital programs in 2020 (2019: 4)

95%

Digital GOALS students:

“I believe I will be successful in the future”
(before the course: 42%)

91%

Digital GOALS students:

“I feel confident using video-conferencing for conversations with professionals”
(before the course: 41%)

62%

ABCN students receiving university offers
(compared with 46% for disadvantaged students)

890+

Mentoring hours by Accenture volunteers to reach ABCN students

140

Laptops donated to ABCN schools

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