

OPPORTUNITY FOR TOP GRADS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SCHOOLS

AUSTRALIA has an unprecedented opportunity to lure the best and brightest graduates into teaching in the current economic climate, a US education leader has said.

Wendy Kopp, CEO and founder of Teach for America and CEO of Teach for All and one of Time Magazine's Top 100 influential people in 2008, is in Australia to lend her support to Teach for Australia – a new not-for-profit leadership program which aims to train top university graduates as teachers and place them for two years in disadvantaged schools.

Teach for Australia provides the perfect opportunity for top graduates to consider a career that will make a difference. This is particularly relevant now, with many business, finance and law graduates finding it especially difficult to secure jobs in their chosen field, Ms Kopp said.

“We can create the silver lining in this economic environment by channeling the talent, which is more available than ever, towards the education sector – which in turn is the key to long-term economic strength and an equal society,” Ms Kopp said.

“With more limited employment prospects in many sectors, Australia’s most accomplished and driven university graduates and young professionals can now think more openly about their career choices.”

Drawing on her experiences from America, Ms Kopp said many young graduates took an opportunity for a rewarding career change into teaching in the face of rising unemployment and economic turmoil.

“We received more than 35,000 applicants for Teach for America, a record-breaking increase of 42 per cent, and the current economic climate presents similar opportunities in Australia,” she said.

With applications for Teach for Australia steadily increasing, the organisation’s CEO Melodie Potts Rosevear said the positive response proved top graduates were passionate about making a constructive difference in the education system.

“Teach for Australia attracts high-calibre graduates who would otherwise not have considered teaching and who are passionate about ensuring a child’s socioeconomic, geographic and ethnic background should not limit the quality of education they receive,” she said.

“We aim to improve the profile of teaching in Australia and improve the outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in a way that everyone involved benefits – the students, schools, graduates, business and society as a whole.”

Teach for Australia appeals to a new breed of graduates who are passionate about connecting with their community, Rufus Black, Chair of Teach for Australia and Master of Ormond College at the University of Melbourne, said.

“Teach for Australia is not just an organisation – it’s a movement,” Dr Black said.

“It grew from young people saying ‘we want to get out there and help on some tough issues’.

““People are looking for meaningful things with their lives and this gives people that opportunity right away.”

Media contacts:

Annalise Walliker, 03 8689 2220, a.walliker@haystac.com.au

Carla Danaher, 03 8689 2225, c.danaher@haystac.com.au



Next year Teach for Australia will place up to 60 of its first 'Associates' in regional and metropolitan schools from term one, the same year Teach for America celebrates 20 years in the United States.

While next year's recruited graduates will be placed in Victorian schools only, Teach for Australia is currently working with DEEWR and Education Departments in other states with the aim of getting additional states on board in the near future

Teach for Australia is the tenth program of its kind in the international Teach for All network and will draw on the many years of experience from its sister programs, adapting the program to suit the Australian education sector.

About Teach for Australia

See attached background material.

About Teach for America

Wendy Kopp conceived the idea for Teach for America while studying at Princeton University.

Troubled by educational inequality facing kids from low socio-economic backgrounds, Wendy wanted to offer her generation an opportunity to make a positive difference in the world.

In 1990, its first year, businesses and foundations donated \$2.5 million to start the Teach for America program and 2,500 graduates from 100 colleges applied for 500 positions.

In the soon to start 2009 US school year, a record breaking 35,000 graduates applied to the program, competing for 4,100 slots.

More than 7,000 young people are now teaching in over 1,600 schools across America through the Teach for America Program.

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