

## Cross Sector Capacity Building Case Study

Taking strategy from good to great

**"To work with leaders of schools is just brilliant;  
their passion is phenomenal."**

Lindsay Cowley, Spark



When Alison Spence applied for the Strategic Leadership Programme for Principals (SLPP) she already had confidence in her leadership work. After seven years at the helm, her school, Kohia Terrace, was pedagogically strong, strategically run, and operationally efficient. But Alison wanted to know for sure.



As a teacher of 38 years, Alison wanted some comparative analysis “out there” for what she was doing in both her own practice and her school. Further, she wanted to have her thinking challenged by someone who would help her see things in new ways for the benefit of her team and students. Lindsay Cowley, GM Wholesale, International & Product, Spark, proved the perfect match.

### A SOLID FOUNDATION

As a volunteer Capacity Partner on SLPP, Lindsay’s role was to provide Alison with a fresh perspective on the challenges she was facing as a leader, supporting what she was learning from the programme curriculum in regular workshops.

Meeting monthly, Lindsay started by asking Alison open, coaching-styled questions centred on what she wanted and how she wanted things improved.

**“Alison had a good charter and strategic plan – all the pieces were there but it was the story that was missing. So throughout the year, we worked on ‘what are the strategic problems, and if this is our ambition for the school, what needs to happen to address these problems?’”**

Lindsay Cowley, GM Wholesale, International & Product, Spark

### ADDRESSING THE GAPS

As the pair interrogated what was already a good strategic plan, they began to see the problem areas that held it back from being great. They had “a lot of conversations” tracking strategic areas backwards to see if the plan was as cohesive and logical as it could be.

Alison says this raised some provocative questions: “A big thing for me became ‘Why are we doing what we’re doing, and where does it fit into the research or best practice literature?’, and putting that in a succinct way, so that anyone picking it up gets it.”

Lindsay concurs: “All the material was there – it just needed to be structured in a way that made real sense to a lay person. What I respect so much is that Alison was always open to that feedback; to a fresh perspective and new ways of looking at things.”

## CROSS SECTOR BENEFITS

Alison says that a highlight of their partnership was the opportunity to visit Spark's Auckland offices, and witness first-hand the modern environments that the students of today are likely to experience when they join the workforce.

She was able to share these insights with her Board of Trustees as a leading concept which business practice is also embracing, thereby bringing gravitas to some of the actions the school was already taking to incorporate modern learning environments for its own students.

Alison can see that the SLPP's emphasis on cross sector collaboration has equal benefits for business: "Being a Capacity Partner is a great opportunity to see what goes on in schools. We say in the education sector that we have all been to school, so everyone is an expert in schools, but things are quite different now from when we went to school; it is a different environment, and there is so much we are dealing with. This is an opportunity to develop an appreciation about the complexity of schools."

## A RIPPLE EFFECT ON OVERALL LEADERSHIP

While Alison has always considered her strategic ability to be pretty good, with Lindsay and SLPP's help she says she is now "a real eight out of ten!" And even better, she is growing a strong leadership team who are all aligned in achieving improved outcomes for their students.

Lindsay's in agreement: "Alison has been able to divest herself of some of the responsibility she was holding, and has brought her team into the journey with her, recognising that they too have a leadership role to play; there is much greater sharing of accountability and empowering of staff in order to achieve outcomes.

"I think those things were there in Alison before, but it's one thing to have it inside your head, it's another thing to be able to easily articulate it to the key people you need to bring on the journey with you. Alison is just so much clearer. I would say her strategic ability has moved from a seven to a nine. A leader who was good is now great!"



## JOIN US

SpringboardTrust exists to improve the life skills – and lives – of young New Zealanders.

Our flagship programme, SLPP, partners senior business leaders or “Capacity Partners” with school principals to build their leadership and planning skills, and in doing so, contribute to improved educational outcomes for schools and their students.

Over 12 months, each Capacity Partner acts as a sounding board for one principal as they step through the curriculum (written by our Chairman Ian Narev, CEO of Commonwealth Bank of Australia) and develop new one and three-year strategic plans for their school using the SLPP framework.

Capacity Partners find the role hugely rewarding. They bring a fresh lens to the leadership challenges faced by principals and provide invaluable skills, knowledge and experience. In return, they receive a great refresher for their own strategic skill set, learn about the role that business can play in education, and get to make a meaningful difference for young New Zealanders.

### SCAFFOLD LEARNING, CHALLENGE THINKING

The SLPP curriculum is delivered in eight 3-hour workshops over 12 months and requires an annual Capacity Partner time commitment of approximately 20-40 hours, including:

- An initial meeting with the principal at their school
- The opportunity to attend several workshops over the year
- Participation in a teleconference debrief after each workshop
- A minimum of two contacts each month with the principal to scaffold their learning and challenge thinking
- Participation in graduation at the end of the programme year

### HOW TO APPLY

SpringboardTrust is always looking for experienced business leaders to train as Capacity Partners.

If you are interested in finding out more about this rewarding voluntary role, please complete an expression of interest (EOI) form available online at [www.springboardtrust.org.nz](http://www.springboardtrust.org.nz)

All Capacity Partners receive full training and support materials. Capacity Partners are also eligible to attend our ongoing programme of alumni leadership workshops and events, and our annual leadership Forum. Experienced Capacity Partners can progress to the role of Facilitator and lead SLPP workshops.

“There are few parts of our corporate lives where we get to do something altruistic,” says Lindsay Cowley, GM Wholesale, International & Product, Spark, of his experience on the programme.

“The beauty of what SpringboardTrust does is that by focussing on the principals, it makes an otherwise daunting task [of helping improve education outcomes for young people] seem achievable, especially when you see the results. To work with leaders of schools is just brilliant; their passion is phenomenal.”

[www.springboardtrust.org.nz](http://www.springboardtrust.org.nz)