

Fast track to first-class support

EVERY SOLICITOR IN A busy firm, big or small, knows how important support staff are in keeping things running smoothly. But the process of finding the right people can be time-consuming and pricey.

When it came to securing a new administrative assistant earlier this year, Sydney solicitor Sharon Moss, a family law specialist with DVA Lawyers, was keen to try something other than newspaper advertisements, word of mouth, or contacting the local TAFE, as she had done previously.

So when she heard about WorkVentures, a non-profit organisation that places trainees, she thought it worth a try.

"From our point of view, it was economical and less time consuming," Moss says.

"The WorkVentures representatives listened to what our needs were. It was easy, simple and they were very proactive."

Under the program, WorkVentures recruit and employs entry-level trainees, who are then contracted to various employers for a 12-month period of training and learning on the job.

While the trainee works full-time with each employer, WorkVentures handles all the administration involved with their employment and training, from workers compensation and superannuation to performance appraisals. Priority is given to people who are unemployed and disadvantaged.

At DVA Lawyers, Moss was in search of a high-calibre trainee, who preferably lived locally, in the northern-beaches.

"Good telephone communication, courtesy to clients, good presentation, accurate document management and confidentiality – all these things are crucial," she says.

After comparing several resumes from WorkVentures, she selected just one to inter-

view, then offered her the job.

Emily Marsh, a school leaver with the HSC, is working towards a Certificate III in Business, and this traineeship is her first full-time job.

"Emily has all the capabilities to do the job," Moss says. "She has computer skills and common sense, and she's willing to do anything we ask of her. She's also extremely punctual. Emily is committed to the traineeship and willing to learn. We are a team of nine and she fits in well already."

Moss was impressed with the standard of applicants on offer through WorkVentures.

"Their screening is quite stringent," she says. "Applicants tend to be motivated young people who understand the importance of a formal qualification."

So far, the arrangement is working well for Emily and the firm, with WorkVentures provided the training resources for Emily to complete her on-the-job training.

"The trainer came to meet with us and discussed our needs so that the study units could be tailored appropriately," Moss says. "All the administrative work is done by WorkVentures and they're doing a great job of looking after her."

Emily says the mix of study and work is great.

"The study units are pretty easy and the work environment is very interesting," she says.

For WorkVentures, the aim is to kickstart careers for young people.

"It's about offering a really good start for these youngsters," says Kim Wadman, Head of Recruitment and Training at WorkVentures.

Working in a law firm is an ambition for many of the recruits.

"Once in amongst the environment, the work is so varied



Emily Marsh (seated) found a career path with Sharon Moss's DVA Lawyers through WorkVentures, a non-profit organisation specialising in traineeships.

and interesting these traineeships can open doors to a career path," Wadman says.

Sharon Moss agrees that administrative work in a law firm is an excellent stepping stone to further careers for young people like Emily.

"One of our colleagues here,

a conveyancing specialist, began as our receptionist," she says.

"I myself started my career as a legal secretary, moved to court reporting and then studied law. You keep going and going and there are plenty of opportunities." □

JODIE THOMSON

