LEADER BOARD 〉 OC HOMEPAGE

Cyndi Court: Partnerships to Fuel Career Readiness

BY CYNDI COURT

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Editor's Note: Cyndi Court is CEO of Tiger Woods' TGR Foundation, which is headquartered in Irvine. Woods' annual golf tournament, the Genesis Invitational, was held over the weekend in La Jolla. The Business Journal's annual special report on healthcare begins on page 13.

In an era where the journey to career success is more complex than ever, it's clear that a traditional path from high school to college to career may not be the best fit for every student. Many students from under-resourced communities are left behind, especially those who don't have strong networks or the financial means to access higher education. But education is not just about a degree; it's about preparing young people for the workforce and equipping them with the skills and experiences that empower them to thrive, regardless of their background.

That's why at TGR Foundation, we believe in the power of partnerships to deliver career-connected learning experiences.

Through collaborations with a wide range of organizations from health care leaders like Providence to career exploration platforms through organizations like Nick Gross' Find Your Grind Foundation, we're able to offer students hands-on, real-world experiences to learn about work through work and at work. These partnerships fuel career readiness in meaningful ways, reshaping the future for many young people.

Bridging the Gap Through Career-Connected Learning

One of the core components of our work at TGR Foundation is ensuring that students are given the tools they need to explore and pursue careers aligned with their strengths and passions. Our goal is not just to educate; we want students to feel empowered to carve their own paths, whether that path leads them to college, a trade school, an entrepreneurial endeavor or directly into the workforce.

Our partnership with Providence is a prime example of this approach in action. Providence is one of the largest healthcare systems in the nation and a leader in Orange County. Together we are offering local students the opportunity to explore healthcare careers in a very hands-on way. This career exploration goes beyond well-known roles like doctor and nurse to highlight career paths in healthcare marketing, community health and outreach, data science and more.

Over the course of our Career Explorer program pilot during the 2023-2024 academic year, numerous Providence healthcare professionals from across the industry connected directly with more than 340 local teens through workshops, panel discussions and STEM-related learning activities. These programs aren't just about theoretical knowledge; they're about exposing students to various career paths and giving them the chance to interact with professionals who can offer guidance, mentorship and advice.

In partnership with the Anaheim Union High School District, this program amplifies what the students are learning in their high school healthcare career pathway, while allowing them the opportunity to tackle real-world health challenges alongside Providence. For example, after reviewing Providence's community health needs assessment, the students collaborated in teams to develop solutions and present their ideas to a panel of professionals. The winning teams from four local high schools even get the opportunity to work with Providence to implement their proposals. This program has been a huge success, with 96% of students reporting having enjoyed learning from industry professionals and 98% gaining a deeper understanding of career opportunities.

For me, as a former educator, nothing is more rewarding than seeing these students present their innovative ideas in a real-world setting that could contribute to meaningful change in their communities. This is education at its core: students realizing their potential and recognizing the vast array of careers that could be available to them if given the right opportunities and mentorship.

Unleashing Potential with Career Exploration

Through another partnership with Find Your Grind Foundation, we are helping students discover careers that align with their passions. It is critical for students to understand their own interests and strengths before they can make informed decisions about their futures. Find Your Grind's platform, which helps students engage in lifestyle assessments and career exploration, is a perfect complement to our mission at TGR Foundation.

One remarkable example of the impact of this partnership is that of Brandyn West, a student who originally aspired to become an ophthalmologist. Through the Find Your Grind program, Brandyn discovered her true passion for storytelling and media, an area she had only considered as a hobby prior to attending the TGR Learning Lab.

To help prepare for a career in cinematography, she has taken a variety of our after-school courses, including podcasting, digital storytelling and photography. She has also capitalized on opportunities like job shadowing experiences that help her develop new skills, meet professionals and expand her understanding of the multimedia landscape. The transformation that Brandyn has gone through is a perfect example of why career exploration is so important — it's about giving students the space to discover who they are, and what they're truly capable of.

We've worked hard to enhance our TGR Learning Lab Anaheim into a space where students can explore these opportunities without fear of failure. Students have access to safe yet dynamic spaces that foster interaction and creativity including a multimedia studio, a makerspace and innovative technology used in today's high demand careers. This is a place where students can come together, collaborate and innovate. It's also a place where students can meet and be mentored by professionals who can help them turn their dreams into reality.

A Collective Commitment to Change

None of this would be possible without the generous commitment and collaboration of business leaders and organizations in Orange County and across Southern California. Companies like Fountain Valley-based Genesis Motor North America, through its Genesis Inspiration Foundation, have invested in our science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) educational enrichment and career readiness programming.

Over the past two years, Genesis has provided TGR Learning Lab students access to STEAM learning opportunities through hands-on projects such as designing future mobility vehicles using reclaimed and upcycled materials. This was a truly creative and innovative approach to engineering education. Students also learned from Ash Corson, director of Gensis product planning, and toured a newly released vehicle. Genesis employees also volunteer their time and expertise, offering mentorship and guidance to the next generation of designers, engineers and business leaders.

To ensure that our programs are deeply impactful and meet the needs of the students, we work collaboratively with the Anaheim Union High School District. The partnership with the district makes it possible for us to provide students with not only after-school programs but also programs during the school day, helping 5th and 6th graders explore careers around STEAM-based subjects at an early age. When we connect nonprofits with philanthropically minded organizations, it leads to greater impact in the classrooms, the workforce and our community.

Looking Ahead: The Future of Education

As I reflect on all the incredible work being done through these partnerships, I can't help but feel a sense of optimism about the future. These programs equip the next generation of leaders with the skills, experiences and confidence they need to succeed. They are not just learning about careers; they are actively participating in shaping the future of industries in STEAM and beyond.

We are proud of the work we're doing at TGR Foundation, but we know there's so much more to be done. As we look ahead, we are committed to continuing to build new partnerships, expand our reach and invest in the future of young people. It's not just about giving them opportunities; it's about changing the way they see their own potential.

There are more students in under-resourced communities who need these types of opportunities and support. We are looking to engage more mission-aligned business leaders and organizations from various STEAM-based industries who have resources, talent and willingness to invest in the next generation.