

Otago Locals - enhancing a sense of 'place'

Stephen Scott

University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
stephen.scott@otago.ac.nz

Angela McLean

University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
angela.mclean@otago.ac.nz

Carole Scott

University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
carole.scott@otago.ac.nz

Most first year students at the University of Otago live in Residential Colleges. As such, they are involved in a range of activities that enhances their transition to university and provides them with a sense of identity and place for campus life. But there is a group of first year 'Local' students who do not live in Colleges and instead live at home, or in flatting situations, and therefore miss out on the experiences of College first year students. Anecdotal reports from these Local students indicate they do not always feel they belong at Otago. In this Showcase presentation we will report on a new practice-based initiative that aims to enhance the sense of belonging for the Local first year students. The programme utilises a peer mentoring programme at Otago, to connect university student peer mentors with Local students. Peer mentoring is an effective support strategy in tertiary education (Terrion & Leonard, 2007); involvement in peer mentoring has positive effects on confidence, academic achievement and can also foster a sense of belonging to a particular learning community (Glaser, Hall & Halperin, 2006; Potter & Hampton, 2009; Ross & Grant, 2011). We will capture the experiences and reflections of this pilot group of Local students as the semester progresses. This information will be used to evaluate the initiative, the retention and success rates amongst this group, and provide further insight into improving and extending the scheme for the larger group of Local students.