

A cafe for all abilities

Kimberly Taylor, 16, is learning how to work in a cafe in a work program at Henbury School
 Pictures: KERI MEGELUS

In a little cafe in the northern suburbs, teenagers are learning skills for the workforce.
NATASHA EMECK reports

THE spirits of the kids working in Henbury's school cafe are some of ability, perseverance and courage that no disability can steal away.

With the delicious smell of freshly made brownies and sausage rolls wafting through the kitchen air, it's hard not to be taken by the enthusiasm these hospitality students have as they eagerly prepare for opening time.

Every Friday morning a long line of customers queue at the Darwin special needs school for brunch at their hidden gem of a cafe.

In just half an hour, the students can take up to more than 70 orders, serving out barista quality coffees and freshly made treats.

Senior Teacher Lauren Hofmeyer, who oversees the transition and pathways programs at the school, said they had been running the cafe for over five years now, starting from humble beginnings at the old Henbury School site.

She said the cafe helped senior students interested in hospitality to develop skills as a part of the school's Transition to Work initiative.

"The whole cafe is run by a group of about 13 students who've done barista or bakery skill sets and have certificates in hospitality," she said.

"They cook all of the food from scratch including sausage rolls, banana bread, brownies, quiches, pizzas and salad wraps.

"This cafe is such a confidence booster for our kids — from beginning to end — it's just incredible.

"You can really see the growth in students from the beginning of the year in their dealings with customers and their independence with the different tasks in the cafe.

"The cafe is about showing the community just how capable our students are as well as providing them with real world experiences that will stand them in good stead for employment post-school.

"The thing is, all of our students want to be included in meaningful ways in our society, and what we do here is a really holistic approach to education, and providing every opportunity for students to participate in the community," she said.

"It's also important for us to increase awareness in the community about what we do, and about our wonderful students."

Cafe cashier Jeremy Dosantos McNeven, 15, said he had been working with the "coffee crew" as he likes to call them, for about two years.

He said the experience he gained in there helped him land his first job as a waiter at KJS Entertainment.

Teachers Leanne Chalker and Lauren Hofmeyer with Nadia Knight, 16, during a work program at Henbury School

