New Academy uses open source as a catalyst for young technologists

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Leading open source company Catalyst IT is helping young technologists get ahead in free software development through a two-week programme of activities and training dubbed the 'Academy'.

"The idea is to give school students with an obvious talent for IT an early opportunity to see how open source software development happens in the real world" said Catalyst Director Mike O'Connor.

"Open source software provides all the tools these students need to pursue their passion, with the freedom to go as far as they want without constraints. We will be equipping them with enough knowledge to unlock their full potential through FOSS" he said.

The Academy's initial intake will see 17 students from 9 Wellington schools spend two weeks in January at Catalyst attending classroom-style workshops and applying what they have learnt to some real open source projects.

"We do place an emphasis on encouraging young women into IT careers, and we're please to have 8 female students participating ".

By the end of the first week students will have installed the sort of software that got Facebook off the ground: PHP and MySQL on Linux. They'll have the development tools to help them collaborate together and to contribute to some open source projects that interest them.

Students will be working a full 9 to 5 day over the fortnight but will receive a $500 grant and a certificate of achievement at the end of the course.

"We'll also be offering our students continued mentoring if they want to get more engaged with an open source project of their choice at the end of the programme" said Mike.

With Android dominating the new wave of mobile computing, and increasing demand for talented open source developers worldwide, Mike sees a bright future for students that get involved with open source at the grass roots.

"Catalyst has proven over the last decade how a local IT company can have global reach with open source software. We have achieved this by attracting some of the brightest minds in the field, but as a company we need the next generation of technologists in New Zealand to help us supply the growing demand for open source, both here and internationally."

Initial interest in the programme has been overwhelming.

" We approached some schools in the local Wellington area just to get the programme started, but judging by the response we could attract ten times this number with some help from outside the region. I can see this really taking off next time around."

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