Crazy Ideas College and IBM upskill the next generation in the age of AI

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Australia’s Crazy Good Tech Challenge inspired many 'crazy' ideas.

Australia’s Crazy Good Tech Challenge with IBM, a collaboration between IBM and Crazy Ideas College (CIC), is designed to connect young people with technical skills.

More than 1,300 students in years seven-10, from schools in ACT, QLD, WA and VIC, participated in a series of design sprints and workshops to generate ideas across four themes: *Learning in the Age of Advanced Technology & AI*; *Cyber-Safe*, *Cyber-Smart Citizens*; *Healthy Habits for Techies*; and *Be Your Best Tech Self*.

“We all benefit when we unlock the ingenuity, resourcefulness, and optimism of young people,” says Crazy Ideas College Founding Director Kieran Murrihy.

“By engaging them in conversations about technology, we harness their wisdom and creativity to solve complex tech challenges. The Crazy Good Tech Challenge will generate solutions to help us all live with and use tech well.”

The judging panel consisted of Kate Tollenaar (IBM), Rosie Thomas (Project Rocket), Janet Searle (CSIRO) and Kate Kerwin (She Codes).

Discovering ways tech can support communities

Tollenaar is the Director, Government and Enterprise Australia/New Zealand with IBM and says the challenge provides students with an opportunity to think and propose ways technology such as AI can improve and support them and their communities in daily life.

“IBM believes in supporting the next generation of technologists and AI-enthusiasts. These students get to prototype and test their concepts, discovering what works and what doesn’t. Technical, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving skills will always be in demand and IBM SkillsBuild helps students prepare for this reality.”

She told EducationDaily it’s important to encourage the creative thinking behind crazy ideas “because it’s fun”.

“Also, many groundbreaking innovations stem from unconventional thinking. Helping students explore unconventional ideas through programs like Australia’s Crazy Good Tech Challenge nurtures critical thinking and creativity, essential skills in both personal and professional realms.

“It encourages young people to think independently and develop their unique voices. Fostering an environment where wild ideas are welcome helps build resilience. It encourages young people to take risks, learn from failures, and adapt their thinking.”

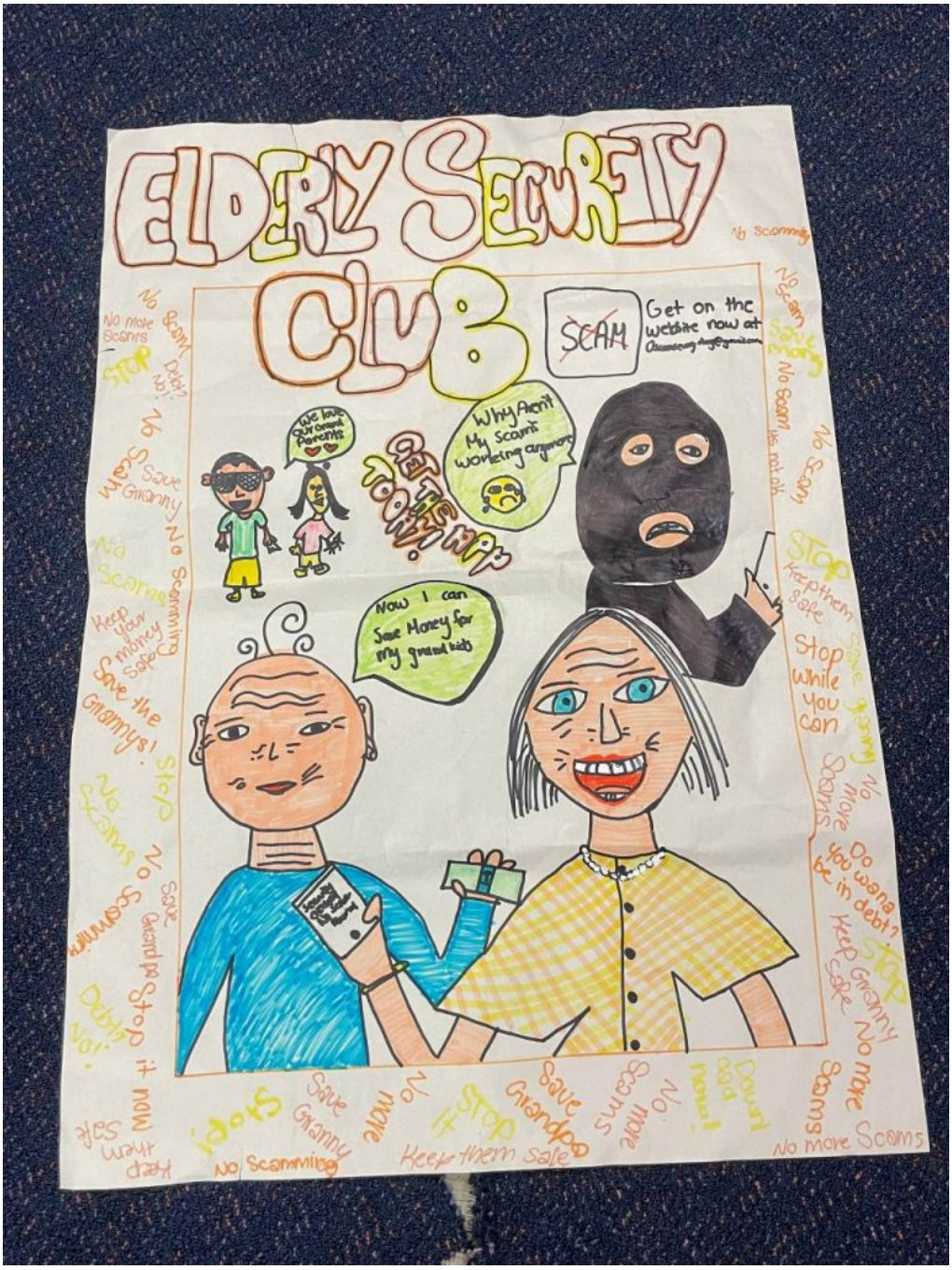
Kate Tollenaar is the Director, Government and Enterprise Australia/New Zealand with IBM.

Tollenaar says we often hear the phrase ‘diverse ideas come from diverse minds’ and believes that “supporting out-of-the-box thinking promotes inclusivity and helps ensure a variety of viewpoints are represented in discussions and projects”.

“What may initially seem impractical can lead to revolutionary concepts and solutions when further explored,” she told EducationDaily.

“Creative ideas have the power to challenge the status quo and encourage new approaches to problem-solving. We know that creative ideas contribute to cultural evolution. They inspire art, literature, technology, and social change, enriching Australian society as a whole and fostering a vibrant, dynamic community.

“When we value and support crazy ideas, we model an open-minded approach for younger generations, encouraging them to think freely and pursue their passions without fear of judgment. By championing creative thinking, we create an environment that thrives on exploration, experimentation, and ultimately, progress.”



Embracing the creative potential of AI

Although many people seem to worry about the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on education, Tollenaar says there are many positives educators ands families should be encouraging young people to embrace.

“Many AI tools are designed to enhance creativity and inspire new ideas. For example, AI can help with idea generation by analysing data and trends, offer prompts, suggest themes and highlight connections between concepts,” she told EducationDaily.

“AI can act as a collaborator, providing suggestions and alternatives. Artists can use AI to explore different styles or musicians can experiment with new sounds, allowing for an expanded creative toolkit. In fields like engineering and design, AI can help simulate environments or predict outcomes, allowing for rapid prototyping and testing of ideas without the cost and time typically involved.

“We can also use AI to tailor educational experiences to individual learning styles, helping students explore subjects in ways that resonate with them. This personalised approach can ignite passion and curiosity, and foster innovation.”

She says schools can integrate AI into the curriculum and teach students about AI’s capabilities and applications.

“Courses in coding, data analysis, and machine learning can demystify the technology and empower students to use it creatively. They can encourage projects that incorporate AI tools, allowing students to experiment with creating their own AI applications, such as chatbots or creative writing aids.”

Parents supporting AI experimentation

Tollenaar says parents can support children in experimenting with AI tools available online, like creative writing assistants or art generators and encourage them to view these tools as partners in the creative process.

“They can talk about the ethical implications of AI, helping children understand its limitations and the importance of human creativity. This can foster responsible and innovative thinking,” she says.

“Encouraging children to pursue creative projects that interest them like coding a game, making music, or creating visual art allows them to explore how AI can enhance those projects. By fostering a mindset that views AI as a collaborator rather than a replacement, we can help students harness its potential to fuel their creativity and innovation.”

Nurturing innovation – one crazy idea at a time

CIC took flight in 2018 with a view that young people ought to have the capabilities, confidence and connections to shape the world around them. CIC partners with schools across Australia to support and challenge young people to step into meaningful and powerful opportunities that enable them to cultivate their talents, boost their personal agency and chase their dreams.

IBM & CIC have partnered together for several years to support young people across ANZ in cultivating leadership qualities, developing bold career aspirations, and leveraging technology to create a positive impact. Together, they have worked with over 18,000 students.

All young people have gained access to IBM SkillsBuild, which is a free online learning platform that brings in-demand tech and professional skills to teachers and students. IBM SkillsBuild provides students with an opportunity to establish a portfolio of digital credentials.

The winning ideas were:

PosiBot (Ashdale Secondary College, WA): An AI companion that monitors online posts, offering advice to encourage kind communication. Users earn points for positive posts and receive strikes for negative ones, fostering a safer online space.

International Touch Grass Day (Ryan Catholic College, QLD): An event encouraging participants to lock away their phones for a day while engaging in outdoor games and activities. The initiative promotes less screen time and more face-to-face interaction.

Botman (Ashdale Secondary College, WA): An AI figure modelled after Batman that helps users identify misinformation. Botman provides free presentations on cybersecurity and 24/7 support through a paid service, making cybersecurity more engaging and accessible.

The JOB-BOT (Ashdale Secondary College, WA): An AI-powered helmet that analyses an individual's traits to suggest the best career paths, helping them discover fulfilling jobs based on their personalities, with the potential to reduce unemployment and underemployment.

Exploring a world of crazy ideas

CIC co-director Zoe Burrows says "we were delighted by the level of thoughtfulness and creativity that the young people brought to their ideas".

"What stood out was how deeply they understood the real-world tech challenges, particularly how we can live well with technology and use it to improve lives," she told EducationDaily.

"The ideas tackled issues such as online safety, healthy tech habits, and using technology to boost learning, with a focus on creating positive, real-world impacts. The winning entries reminded us how we can leverage technology to address these issues in fun, innovative and meaningful ways."

Crazy Ideas College co-director Zoe Burrows.

This year was the first time they ran the Crazy Good Tech Challenge with IBM, and Burrows says “we couldn’t be more pleased with the appetite from schools and young people alike to get involved”

“The initiative was born out of a desire to provide young people a platform to express their ingenuity and creativity around the role technology plays in their lives and be involved in the tech conversation.

“We were inspired to create a program that challenges students to think critically about how technology can be used for good. Based on the overwhelming success of this year’s challenge, we are planning to run the next edition in 2025, with plans to expand into more regions across Australia and New Zealand.”

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