Want to change the world?

ENTER THE IMAGINE CUP 2012 – THE WORLD'S HOTTEST STUDENT TECHNOLOGY COMPETITION – AND YOUR IDEAS COULD HELP SOLVE SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST PRESSING PROBLEMS.

It seems every time you turn around, there's another epic challenge popping up: world hunger, disease, environmental change; the list goes on and on.

The Imagine Cup is not just another extra-curricular time-filler – it's the global competition where students apply imagination and technology to tackle some of the world's toughest problems.

Since it started in 2003, students have come up with amazing solutions to improve education and reduce poverty and child mortality. Previous winners have created a diverse range of ideas, from an app that helps search-and-rescue teams coordinate their efforts during natural disasters to navigation software allowing physically disabled people to overcome obstacles by identifying barrier-free routes through cities.

Winning teams have a chance to share their ideas at the world finals right here in Australia and compete for cash grants and other prizes. The 2011 Imagine Cup finals in New York saw cash prizes of $215,000 awarded and the announcement of a $3 million, three-year grant to help students' entry ideas come to life.

Making it to the finals has kick-started many ICT careers, helping students stand out from the competition. Many past participants have even gone on to create their own successful start-ups based on their innovative entries.

The skills and experience you could gain while developing your ideas, the confidence that comes with presenting your innovations, and the access you get to influential business leaders could be life changing, as they've been for many previous contestants.

Last year, a team from Canberra University took out the national round of the Imagine Cup with the 'Brain Speller' – a device designed to help sufferers of dementia, paralysis and brain damage that can read people's brain signals and translate them into text.

Imagine Cup 2011 national champions: from left, Le Nguyen, Kim-Mai Bui, Lap Duong, Paul Du.

The team, which consisted of two undergrads, an honours student and a masters student, adapted existing brainwave monitoring technology to successfully direct a remote-controlled car. To show their commitment to the idea beyond the competition, they even got it working with a motorised wheelchair after the finals, and are considering Brain Speller's application to social networking sites and household appliances.

"We're excited ... to create a product that will improve lives and genuinely help with an issue that affects so many people in this country," team leader Paul Du said. "Great ideas come from imagination and our team wouldn't be here right now without it."

The team also put its win down to the support from its mentor, software engineering Associate Professor, Dat Tran. who has an impressive track record in the Imagine Cup. Under his mentorship, Canberra University students have won five national titles since 2006.

Only students can enter and compete in the Imagine Cup, but they're not the only ones that can get involved:

Become an Imagine Cup Mentor: students come up with the amazing solutions – but they can't do it without mentors. So if you're an academic, business or ICT professional who knows how to inspire people, these young minds need your help. As a mentor you don't come up with the idea – that's the team's job. But you can help by answering questions and challenging them to think big and follow their dreams. Register to be a mentor now at imaginecup.com.au

Spread the word: do you know any inspiring young minds that would like to get involved? Email OzImagineCup@microsoft.com to obtain materials that will help spread the word.

Register today at imaginecup.com.au. ■

Future leaders host industry lunch

Four of the ICT industry's future leaders hosted the inaugural ACS Foundation industry lunch in Sydney on 22 November, 2011. Each of the hosts commenced their careers through an ACS Foundation scholarship and, by hosting this event, they were able to showcase how their careers have progressed in the past few years since graduation.

While over 110 information technology enthusiasts packed the Westin Hotel to hear about the latest trends in big data from IBM's managing director, Andrew Stevens, he had to share the limelight with these emerging leaders.

Launching the event was John Painter, who completed his scholarship placement while he was studying at the University of Western Sydney. Painter recognised Frontline's generosity in hosting his internship and reflected on how it boosted his career.

Introducing the program agenda was Glenn O'Sullivan, who undertook his scholarship with Computer Associates while he was a BIT student at UTS. O'Sullivan outlined how he gained valuable insights into not only what to do and what he wanted to do, but also exposure to organisational behaviour that would not have been possible otherwise. "The experience really gave my career enormous benefits and I feel has really fast tracked it," O'Sullivan said.

Facilitating a question and answer session was Sophie Green, who enjoyed a marketing scholarship placement at IBM. Green joked about how even though she had been studying marketing, she had no idea as to what was involved until her practical experience. Now she has graduated, she is building an ICT sales career with Microsoft, which she never would have believed just two years ago.

Thanking Andrew Stevens for his presentation was Andrew Knevitt, who undertook a mature age placement while studying a Master in Business Information Systems degree at the University of Sydney. Knevitt shared how his career path changed from business into ICT. His placement with CSC provided the relevant technical experience he needed to springboard into his new profession.

The inaugural industry lunch was a successful concept and will be rolled out to other Australian capital cities. Look out for your local bright young talent hosting an event near you soon.