

'Not just roads, rates and rubbish': Gwydir Council engages young learners



Rod Smith (Training and Development Manager) and Leeah Daley (Organisation Development Director), Gwydir Council

Recruiting for key positions at Gwydir Council had become a persistent, on-going challenge. It was time for a new approach to succession planning, training and engaging the ageing workforce — or face the possibility of simply not having enough people to provide vital services to the local area.

One new approach, school-based traineeship and apprenticeship programs, are now an integral part of the council's workforce planning strategy. They are run in co-operation with local high schools, TAFE and Australian Business Limited Apprenticeships Centre (ABLAC).

All job roles are considered. 'It's not about it being cheaper, it's about retaining talent in our community,' said Leeah Daley, the council's Organisation Development Director. The council also wanted to encourage local young people to complete their HSC. 'Where some of our successful school-based trainees would probably have left school at or before Year 10, they like coming to work and that's the motivation to continue school.'

'Over 70% of local students will not go to university and it would be irresponsible not to cater for them,' said Rod Smith, Training and Development Manager. Rod concedes there have been some challenges, such as integrating young people into an older workforce, but says there have been many achievements.

School-based trainees and apprentices have worked in the gym, aged care and child care facilities, on their front counters and in three traditional trades with commercial cookery, carpentry and automotive apprenticeships. A recent general construction training course with on-the-job training at a real building site (the Warialda Showground) provided a good opportunity to assess participants' aptitude for some of the possible trade roles.

‘... not just roads, rates and rubbish’

Leeah said Gwydir Council has been speaking to schools to ‘let them know that council is a bit sexy — that it’s not just roads, rates and rubbish – it can take them on different career paths.’ The council is already seeing a turnaround. While they previously had difficulty attracting students even for work experience, now parents are asking the council to keep their children in mind. ‘They like the idea of their kids leaving school with one year of their apprenticeship under their belt,’ Leeah said.

In addition to training new staff, the ‘existing worker’ traineeships for medical centre, outdoor and managerial staff have resulted in over 90% of council employees now holding a qualification in the council. This figure was only 7% just four years ago.

Funding provided by the federal government helps to subsidise training for the growing number of employees who see that a nationally recognised qualification benefits their job security, pay and prospects for promotion.

In the past three years, Gwydir Council has won the NSW State Training Initiative Award and the prestigious AR Bluett Memorial Award. The council aims to continue to respond to the training & development needs of its employees and the community.

For more information about apprenticeships, traineeships and the possible incentives your business may attract, please contact Australian Business Limited Apprenticeships Centre on 1300 652 236 or visit www.ablac.com.au.