

Perseverance and partnership pay for Gympie job seeker

Since October last year, lovers of rail looking to experience something new have flocked to Gympie for the chance to relive a vital part of Queensland's rail history courtesy of the not-for-profit organisation, Mary Valley Rattler. In just six months, thousands of passengers have already traversed the route from Gympie to Amamoor on lovingly restored heritage trains through the picturesque Mary Valley.

Sparked by this revival of the local rail heritage, 54-year-old Gympie resident, Gary Banks, seized the opportunity to learn new skills when he joined Energy Skills Queensland's (ESQ) Career Start Rail Skills program, completing the Certificate II in Rail Infrastructure with Registered Training Organisation, Centre for Excellence in Rail Training, on-site at Mary Valley Rattler. Only a few months down the track, he is now an integral part of the Rattler's rail maintenance team.

"Gary went through the first round of ESQ's Gympie rail training program with us at the Rattler. His resilience, persistence and willingness to learn have always made him a pleasure to work with. Gary had previously worked on a Work for the Dole project with us and showed really great commitment. He continued to volunteer with us after that project, and when the Gympie Rail program came up with ESQ, we strongly encouraged him to apply," says the Rattler's Safety and Training Manager, Julia Avis.

Gary was successful in his application to the ESQ program, and continued to demonstrate his determination and eagerness to learn. As one of the program's older participants, he demonstrated not only his willingness to work as part of a team, but also his aptitude for leadership, taking many of the younger participants under his wing. He supported participants with low levels of literacy and numeracy through the various online components and inductions in the program, helping overall participant retention and success, Julia says.

No work was available immediately on completion of the program in December 2018, but Gary continued to volunteer with the Rattler.

"He's definitely one of those people who like to see work through to completion. He kept on with the same rail restoration work he had started in training," Julia says.

"Before coming on board with us, Gary didn't have a fantastic work history, but he has a lot of lifeskills. Sometimes the younger ones who end up in unemployment have a lot of issues. Gary guided them through the correct techniques he'd learned through training and volunteering with us."

"He's also lived in Gympie his whole life. He's very much settled here, with all his family and friends nearby. Work is not easy to find in and around Gympie by any means. There's not a whole lot of local jobs, and a lot of people need to travel for work. We were eager to employ our own track worker instead of hiring contractors. By then, Gary was a really integral member of the track work crew. We don't have new track here which means the skills needed are a bit different. Gary already had these."

“So after four months, when we finally had the opportunity to put someone on, we encouraged Gary to apply. He’s shown us that if you put your mind to something, that you can achieve it by going the extra mile. He’s got the tenacity and the right personality,” Julia says.

ESQ’s Gympie Rail Project Coordinator, Chandel Sears, said the ongoing partnership with Mary Valley Rattler has been integral to Gary’s success, particularly in a region where good jobs are hard to find.

“It’s been a fantastic outcome for us at ESQ, the team at the Rattler and for others involved in the program as well,” Chandel said.

“Gary loves it. He’s really excited about this outcome because it’s something that he wanted to achieve. Staying local near family and friends is really important to him. His community is here, and Gympie is currently a very hard region to find work. There’s only a couple of industries doing well, so this is a happy outcome for all of us,” Chandel said.



Gary Banks (third from the left, with the long beard) at work along the Mary Valley Rattler tracks