

Re-training brings new lease on life for Gympie job seeker

Every day, people working in frontline service professions touch the lives of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged community members. But for the often unsung heroes at the coalface, this work can take a terrible toll.

Gympie resident, Paul Smith, had worked as a career social worker, extending support to people in the courts experiencing drug and alcohol problems. Years of this work contributed to a significant breakdown that robbed Paul of his confidence, leaving in its place anxiety, depression, confusion, and a sense of hopelessness.

A community-based training initiative coordinated by Energy Skills Queensland (ESQ) and funded through the Queensland Government's Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative helped Paul to rebuild his life, find work, and gain a new sense of purpose, says ESQ Project Coordinator, Chandel Sears.

"Paul first approached us in a pretty bad state. His breakdown had left him unsure of what he could do. His previous career had been quite taxing and he was pretty out of sorts. Just approaching us and getting back into a group environment was extremely challenging for him," Chandel recalls.

"In the beginning at the information session and the induction, we talked about what the program would entail, and the supports that were available to him. I came to understand the effects of his earlier experiences, and learned that he did indeed want to do something positive with his life, but would need a lot of wrap around support."

ESQ's SolarQ Renewables Project was preparing participants for work in the renewal energy sector, teaching them the safe work practices and basic technical skills to assist in the build of solar farms around Queensland.

"We had a fantastic trainer in the program who we worked closely with to provide the right support to Paul and the other participants," says Chandel. "Paul's confidence quickly started to grow. I went to see participants during each week to have individual chats with everyone to see how they were doing, how they were progressing through the training, and to see what support they needed. It was really group-based, practical training, and they all interacted really well with each other. The trainer made sure that everyone was included in all the learning activities, and I could see the confidence growing across the room every time I visited."

As Paul's anxiety diminished, he bonded with the group and really enjoyed the training. After a few weeks, ESQ helped Paul with an application to Gympie Regional Council. He secured an interview and successfully gained work as a Council Maintenance Worker before the completion of ESQ's program.

"For Paul to get a full-time job with the local Council was a tremendous outcome for him and his family," Chandel says. "The only thing he was unhappy about was that Council wanted him to start immediately, so he couldn't finish the course with his newfound friends and classmates. But our

program, support and the new job have given him that confidence back again. Paul is now in a hands-on role where he's not feeling that emotional pressure anymore. He couldn't be happier."