

## **CASE STUDY:** TACKLING AN AGEING WORKFORCE WITH TRAINEESHIPS

**COMPANY:** Coffs City Cranes

**HOTSPOT REGION:** Mid-North Coast

**TARGET:**

1. Building the profile of career pathways in the crane industry
2. The benefits of implementing a traineeship program into the business
3. An ageing workforce- How government funded training programs help close the generational gap
4. Encouraging employers to provide opportunities to disengaged students

Coffs City Cranes is a family-owned business based in Coffs Harbour on the Mid-North Coast of NSW. Having experienced significant growth since they began in 1999, the business faced the on-going challenges of an ageing workforce, as well as attracting new talent to the crane industry.



On the back of an infrastructure boom and partnerships with tier one construction giants such as CPB, Lendlease and Vision Stream, the business invested heavily in the purchase of new plant and equipment to enable them to meet the growing demand for civil work across the North Coast region.

The management team were aware the industry employed an ageing workforce. The strategy was to introduce a training program for its entry level workforce which could help support the training of younger people in the correct and safe way. Emma Makinson, Operations Manager said “We knew there was a generational gap in the industry and also in our business. We have a number of employees facing retirement and when jobs become available, we have attracted younger people, but they don’t know our industry. In some cases, they have their tickets through working in the mines, but they don’t have general hire or civil construction experience”.

There were some early challenges in setting up the program. TAFE did not have the modules available due to a lack of interest in the course, so Coffs City Cranes set about building partnerships with local schools. “We were approached by a local high school who had students with limited interest in school and who no longer wanted to be at school. We decided to take them on, two days a week, for work experience. This then grew to 3 days per week and some were eventually put on as full-time trainees”.

During an industry conference in 2018, Emma spoke with other business owners who had successfully adopted the Crane Traineeship Program. “I jumped at it believing it would be the best and right way to train people about the industry.” The program required a minimum of 14 students to run, so Emma approached crane companies across the region, promoting the benefits of implementing a traineeship program for their entry level workforce.

The program ensures trainees are taught the latest knowledge and skills from qualified operators, riggers, doggers and associated trades.

Federal government financial incentives are available to assist throughout the term of the traineeship (eligibility criteria applies). Trainees finish with a nationally recognised qualification and appropriate high-risk licences, which will provide a competitive difference in the job market while learning in the workplace.

According to both Emma and Sandra Makinson, there are numerous positives to the Traineeship program.

“Traineeships are a great way of combining employment and training to develop someone’s skills leading to a Certified Qualification and ongoing employment and they provide business owners with not only competent and employable candidates, but developed individuals with skills, experience and commitment to the industry,” she said.

“As a partnership between employers, trainees and the Registered Training Organisation, individuals are able to earn money, learn skills and gain accredited qualifications at the same time.

“The program provides companies like ours with the opportunity to give something back to others with the confidence trainees are being taught the right behaviours and are gaining valuable experience in real work and industry environments. Hopefully, this provides a head start and a pathway to a lifelong career in the crane sector”

Since starting the traineeship program, Coffs City Cranes has taken on trainees and they haven’t looked back. Emma is using her industry networks to build the profile of these career paths. Industry publication, Cranes And Lifting have also been instrumental in helping promote the Crane Traineeship Program.

“The program is exceeding our expectations. The youth love it, they are doing something they really enjoy, they’re enthusiastic and want to learn. They listen and the program is excellent in terms of learning the ‘right way’ regarding safe work practices. Some of our clients have been apprehensive allowing a trainee to be working on their project, especially when it’s complicated like lifting tilt up panels, but after three days the client will be shaking the trainees hand impressed with their contribution and professionalism,” said Makinson.

“It’s also good for the older guys in our crew as they are encouraged to go back to basics as they teach the trainees. We find the senior guys can get a bit complacent when they’ve been doing a certain job a certain way for a long time. When they stop and explain what they are doing and why, it’s a good reminder for them.

“I think it is a very positive process for anyone in our industry. We’ve currently got four trainees in our program. We would have had five, but one was too young to start last year. He’s started his diesel mechanics apprenticeship and starts his crane traineeship next year,” she said.

“We’re happy with the way the program works. We’ve got one trainee who enjoys working in the office on the lift planning and spread sheets. They are very motivated, and we don’t need to worry about their attitudes, and they love the work. At the end of the day, it’s all about managing your employees as individuals. The program is working for us and our trainees are getting hands experience of our industry,” said Makinson.

We have since enrolled another 3 trainees to start in July 2020.



*Coffs City Cranes trainees- Simon Edwards, Darrin McGilvery, Douglas Collins, Sam Russo (photo courtesy of Cranes and Lifting [www.cranesandlifting.com.au](http://www.cranesandlifting.com.au) )*