

## **CASE STUDY:**

# BUILDING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE OF THE HORTICULTURE INDUSTRY

**COMPANY:** Neighbourhood Jobs - Wentworth Community Housing

**HOTSPOT REGION:** Western Sydney

**TARGET:** Partnering with pre-employment programs to feed industries facing a skills shortage

Pre-employment programs creating sustainable employment opportunities to youth  
Addressing the critical skills gap faced by the horticulture industry.

How the horticulture industry can feed talent into the broader construction industry.

### **About Neighbourhood Jobs**

Neighbourhood Jobs is a Western Sydney based property care business, which provides hands-on training and paid local employment to disengaged youth from the region. Neighbourhood Jobs is wholly owned by Wentworth Community Housing and is proudly funded by the NSW Department of Education.

The development program provides coaching and training in both occupational skills and life skills. Participants focus on workplace safety, workplace communication and work towards building a strong work ethic. Youth graduate from the program with work-ready skills and a vision for their future.

### **The recruitment challenges facing the horticulture industry**

With the population soaring, there has never been a bigger demand for horticultural services across Western Sydney. However, securing a landscaping apprenticeship has been hard for many young people, due to the nature of the customer base. Customers are often spread across a large geographical base, with a high volume of work in new residential areas that have little or no public transport options. Further to this, the industry often demands that job candidates have skills, experience, but more importantly, have a driver licence and access to a vehicle.

The obvious challenge for jobseekers remains- they cannot afford a licence and car without a job but cannot land a job without a licence and car.

## **How Neighbourhood Jobs are Tackling the Skills Shortage**

The program was introduced in response to the growing demand to improve communities across Western Sydney.

The employability skills that the program teaches are addressing a key gap for graduates to enter careers which are facing a critical skills shortage. Graduates are entering the workforce with the employability skills and work readiness that businesses are demanding. Many of the young people who complete the program enjoy the landscaping work so much that they want to secure a landscaping apprenticeship, however, the greatest struggle has been in connecting them with employers.

The aim is to be the 'foot-in-the-door' employer so that we can change the lives of local young people. Neighbourhood Jobs relies heavily on local landscape companies to take on graduates, and in supporting them to work around the issue of not having a licence and vehicle.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the program, Neighbourhood Jobs is looking to partner with more organisations to provide work-ready candidates to and to tailor the program to meet their specific requirements.

## **Partnering with a community program**

According to Sarah Howle, Sustainable Employment Officer, Neighbourhood Jobs, it provides a fresh approach to recruitment. "The advantage of looking at a young person's potential over their experience on paper has led to finding amazing, hard-working, dedicated and passionate young people. The ones that are often stereotyped as 'trouble-makers' are usually the hardest workers, just wanting a chance to prove themselves, earn their own way in life and be given back a sense of power over their life choices." Sarah said there are added benefits of connecting with the local community. "The local communities are what makes Neighbourhood Jobs work. Without the local communities support our business would not have gotten to its current state. It is the local communities that share our program, our services and our mission with others. They are the link to helping us gain valuable and supportive customers, to finding young people who would benefit from the program and they are the ones that champion our work. We started with only 8 young people and we have now trained and employed over 40 young people"

## **The social benefits of partnering with a community program**

Sarah added that when a business employs one of their participants, the overall social benefits are enormous. "for those young people we have been the difference between falling through the cracks in society and staying engaged and wanting a better future for themselves.

Some of the young people who have secured second employment have not only changed their lives but their families lives too. Some of them are the first in their family to secure full-time work. For some people working full-time is the 'norm' but it easy to forget about those people who have inter-generational dependence on social housing and social welfare, it is these young people who may be trapped in the poverty cycle that we are trying to assist to break free from this and show them how to make a better future for themselves."

**Program Graduate :** Jacob King

**Program:** Neighbourhood Jobs

**Organisation:** Wentworth

Jacob King is 20 years old from Cambridge Park. Jacob works for Wentworth: Neighbourhood jobs as a casual landscaping trainee. Has been doing so for approximately seven months.

Jacob has an immune system deficiency that he manages and lives with daily. Upon leaving school Jacob wanted to pursue a career in sports science, but his personal circumstances meant that this was not an option. Jacob looked at alternatives and identified vocational learning as an alternative that he would like to try. Getting paid whilst learning and gaining a trade appealed to Jacob.

Jacob was not working at the time and signed up with Nova Employment who helped Jacob identify a pathway that suited his interests. They looked at various options and based upon Jacob's desires in a job, discussed the option of a Landscaping Traineeship. Working with Nova, Jacob obtained the relevant information regarding a Traineeship in Landscaping and attended an advertised open evening to learn more about Wentworth and the opportunities that they have available. From this Jacob was invited to an interview which he subsequently "smashed".

Since that successful interview, Jacob has been working for the last seven months as part of the Neighbourhood Jobs crew. Starting at 7 am, Jacob meets the crew at a designated pick-up location. Typically, the crew undertake up to five landscaping jobs per day. Standard job includes lawnmowing, whipping, weeding, edging, collecting and disposing of waste. Jacob "loves" the working with the Neighbourhood jobs crew and the physical aspect of the job. Jacob says that "It's not going to be easy! But, if you enjoy physical work, it's really good. There's a lot of teamwork and you get the opportunity to work with some great people. It's the best job!"

Jacob has developed a very strong skillset over this time. He has built the employability skills and work ethic to establish a long-term career in the horticulture industry. After participating in Neighbourhood Jobs, Jacob, like so many of his fellow program graduates has developed the skills the industry is crying out for and has immensely improved his career prospects to pursue a horticulture traineeship or apprenticeship.

To find out more about hiring work ready candidates like Jacob, please contact Wayne Humphrey on 0419 897 775.