



Charles Sturt  
University



# ‘A trade of one’s own’

Regional NSW stakeholder findings – barriers and proposed  
solutions for women in the manual trades

2019

## Acknowledgements

This project is funded by the Institute for Land, Water and Society, the Faculty of Arts & Education and the Faculty of Business, Justice & Behavioural Sciences. Special thanks to the Institute for Land, Water and Society for funding the publication of this report.

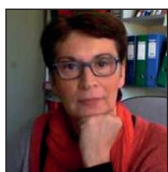
Many thanks to the industry stakeholders who gave up their time to participate in these consultations and whose pictures grace these pages. Special thanks to Ladex Construction Group Pty Ltd, Cassy's Coatings – Painting and Decorating, Skillset Ltd, Sullivan Project Group and John B Electrical for contributing their stories.

The Women in Trades team would also like to thank Simone Engdahl, Kris Gibbs and Nikki Scott from ILWS for their marketing, administrative and budget support as well as Hannah Reeks and Nardia Surawski for the design and layout of this report and Mark Filmer for final edit of this report. Special thanks also to first year carpentry apprentice Laila Bennett for the action shots on page 5.

## Women in Trades: Understanding Resilience research team



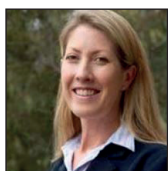
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**Dr Stacey Jenkins – School of Management & Marketing, Faculty of Business, Justice and Behavioural Sciences.** Chief Investigator – extensive human resource industry and TAFE teacher experience.



**Dr Elizabeth Wulff – Faculty of Arts & Education.** Research Officer & Investigator – experience researching social roles, gender identity politics and body/landscape relations.



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A Charles Sturt University publication, August 2019. CSU reserves the right to make alterations to any information contained within this publication without notice. Printed by CSU Print Bathurst.

ISBN 978-1-86-467350-0





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## From the VC



Congratulations from the Vice-Chancellor and President, Charles Sturt University.

As the Vice-Chancellor of Charles Sturt University, I am very pleased to support this vital report.

The sustainability and skills of regional New South Wales are very important for not only the regions, but the entire country. The university provides vital research to identify issues and propose practical solutions to ensure our regions thrive into the future. Alongside this, the issues of gender equity and gender participation are relevant to every profession.

As a university we have successfully gained Employer of Choice for Gender Equality status. Championing this for the regions and supporting other industries to strive for inclusion is a really important deliverable as a key driver of intellectual capital in regional NSW. I would like to congratulate the staff who have contributed to this key piece of research.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Vann".

Professor Andrew Vann  
Vice-Chancellor and President

## From ILWS



Congratulations from the Director, Institute for Land, Water and Society, Charles Sturt University.

I am very pleased to support the Women in Trades consolidated stakeholder findings report 'A trade of one's own'. This report, and the team's broader research project, investigates how women achieve sustainable careers in the manual trades in regional areas.

The Institute for Land, Water and Society (ILWS) is a multi and trans-disciplinary research centre. We undertake biophysical, social and economic research to address local, regional, national and global issues. Our researchers are involved in individual, collaborative and commissioned work around Australia and the world.

This report and the team's broader research project aligns with ILWS's research objectives, specifically the Regional and Rural communities theme through its focus on enhancing the wellbeing and livelihoods of rural and regional communities.

I wish the Women in Trades team every success as their research in this area progresses.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Max Finlayson".

Professor Max Finlayson  
Director Institute for Land, Water & Society



## Special thanks to our industry stakeholder participants from Albury, Bathurst and Wagga Wagga

Kerry Footman, Alana Pendrick, Martin Bennett, Brian Millar  
TAFE NSW; Kate Storer, GOTAFE; Anne Shaw, NETracks LLEN; Linda Ireland, Leanne McKenzie, Gina Perks, Garry Whittaker, Training Services NSW; Jennifer Klippel, Deb Bender, Craig Leet Apprenticeship Support Australia; Craig Przibilla, SafeWork NSW; Edwina Hayes, Regional Development Australia (RDA) Murray; Cathy LeCerf and Sarah Stevenson, ATEL; Craig Randazzo, Jill Notzon, Jane McWilliam, Skillset; Steve Hodder, Charlotte Inwood, Verto Apprenticeship Network; Kerrie Rawsthorne, Melanie Howell, Matt Watts, Sarina Russo apprenticeships; Omesh Jethwani, Master Builders Association NSW; Megan Lawrence, Fair Work Ombudsman; James Smith, Personnel Group; Rob Dickins, GTES; Samantha Degen, Kestrel Apprentice Solutions; Sharnee Christie, CVGT; Nissa Villegas, Jennifer Pluis (apprentice) Albury City Council; Fiona Pitz, Josh Rudd Wagga Wagga City Council; Paula Beattie, Guinevere Missingham, Orange City Council; Cheryl Howarth, Lucy Tromastad, Orange Women's Shed; Celeste Brockwell, Rachel Richards, Wangaratta Government Centre; Catherine MacMillan, Benalla Rural City Council; Richard Pottie, LADEX Construction Group; Bec Hopper, Emma Nicol PAH Construction; Jenny Sharp, Narrisa Kinghorne, Cadia Valley Operations, Newcrest Mining Ltd; Graeme Bensley, Fay Bensley, Bill Dunlop, Kylie Hunt, GB Auto Orange; Leena Laffey, Team Delaney Tiling Solutions; Rohan Hansford,

Bridget Smith,  
John B Electrical;  
Cassie Shanahan,  
Cassy's Coatings  
– Painting and

Decorating; Mick Barrows, Laila Bennett, Border Commercial Carpentry and Plastering; Beth Gales, Oven & King Builders; Jean Cumming, Supporting and Linking Tradeswomen (SALT);

Sue Collins,  
CSU Campus  
Services; Mark  
Tait, CFMEU;  
Caryn Walsh,  
Empowering  
Women  
to Thrive



# The big picture

Occupations associated with gender identity are typically highly gender segregated and the manual trades are among the most gender segregated occupations in the Australian labour market. Women currently make up approximately 1–3% of all workers in the manual trades in Australia, a figure consistent with global trends. Despite efforts from both government, and industry, there has been little shift in this situation in 30 years (ABS, 2018). The manual trade occupations include: electro-technology, automotive, bricklaying, carpentry, painting/decorating, metal fabrication and plumbing. This data is reflected by low VET completion rates for women in these trades (NCVER 2018). The National Skills Needs List (Australian Government, 2015) identifies that regional Australia experiences skills shortages in all of these trades. The economic advantages of diversity and inclusive employment policies are well established and are a key strategy in addressing regional skills shortages. While stakeholders, such as government, industry and organisations i.e., Women NSW, Master Builders, Women in Construction and SALT (Supporting & Linking Tradeswomen), are actively developing strategies that seek to recruit more women to take up trades and maintain employment in the trades, there are few studies that have considered how women thrive and succeed in non-traditional work. Finding solutions to the problem of gender segregation in the manual trades goes beyond government and industry needing to address the skills shortage, to providing viable employment alternatives to women. The manual trades offer women a well-paid occupation that will remunerate them, and their families, more adequately than occupations where women traditionally dominate such as childcare and hairdressing.

	1988	1998	2008	2018
Occupation	Percentage of women in occupation			
Electro technology & telecommunications trades	1.1	1.8	2.8	1.9
Construction trades (bricklaying, carpentry, painting/decorating, metal fabrication and plumbing)	1.3	1.1	0.8	1.4
Automotive and engineering trades	1.1	0.9	1.4	1.1

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018). Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, Feb 2018, Table EQ8 Employed persons

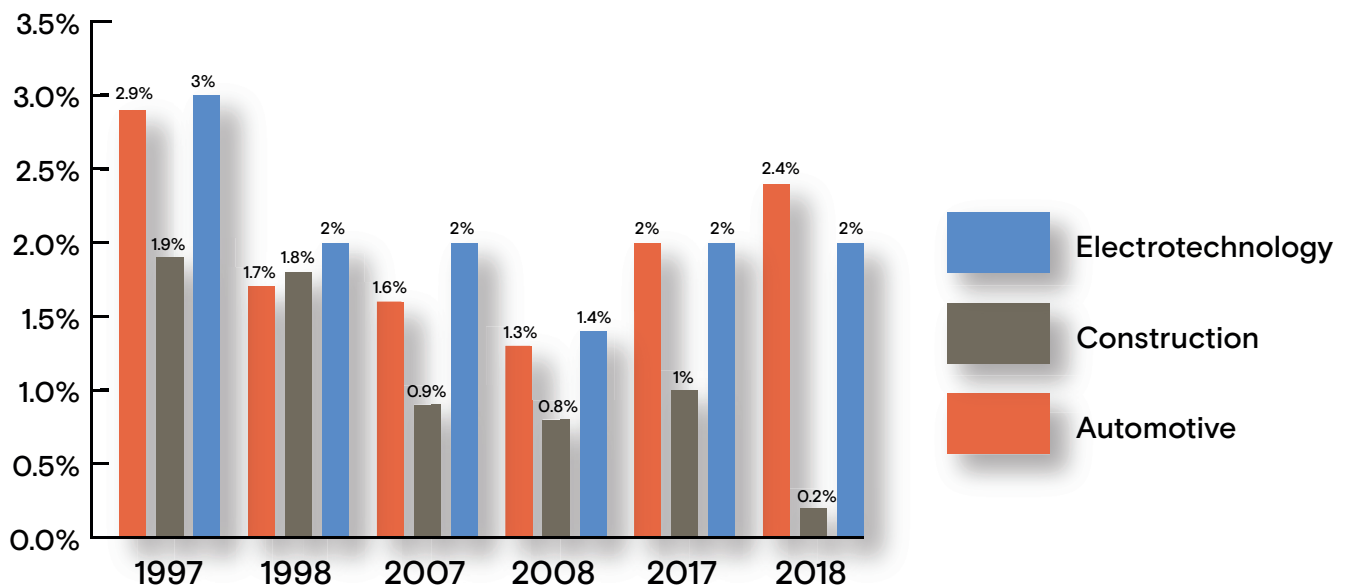
## Women in trades: understanding resilience – project summary

The aims of the CSU “Women in Trades” study are to investigate areas that are fundamental to understanding how women, in regional New South Wales particularly, achieve sustainable careers in the manual trades. It explores why and how women are recruited and retained in such occupations, how they contribute to productivity in the workplace and how these factors promote longevity and career satisfaction. Our research explores the role of individual resilience, socio-cultural factors and workplace cultures in supporting women’s personal and professional success in the manual trades. Our research ultimately explores why some women prosper in jobs that are considered traditionally male-dominated, while others do not.



To date the project team has engaged in eight media outreach opportunities around the nation, presented at two international conferences, three national conferences, five regional symposiums and conducted three comprehensive industry stakeholder consultations. We have conducted 27 in-depth interviews with tradeswomen, apprentices, group training organisations, industry support agencies, employers, VET providers and school careers advisers. Our preliminary findings are published in the *International Journal of Training Research* and online in *The Conversation*.

## Women Apprentices and Trainee Completions Rates (NCVER 2018)



Sourced from: <http://vocstats.ncver.edu.au/webapi/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml>

## This report

This document reports the consolidated findings across three comprehensive industry stakeholder consultations held in Albury, Bathurst and Wagga Wagga during 2018. These consultations provided illumination about the persistent barriers to women's recruitment and retention as well as insights revealing how women can pursue successful, meaningful careers. As part of the broader research project, these consultations were a grassroots initiative to understand the lived experiences of tradeswomen, apprentices, the industry they work in and the organisations that support them. This report also showcases some of their stories.







# Findings

## The Barriers to women's employment in the manual trades

Findings from stakeholder consultations identified several barriers for women entering male-dominated trades. These are summarised below and are organised under the headings “recruitment” “retention” and “education and training”. All of the barriers have a relationship to societal and cultural expectations about gender roles and gendered perceptions and the gendered workplace culture of the building and construction industries (beliefs, values and practices that construct the work as a masculine domain).

The complex reasons for barriers, as evidenced by industry, offer important insight into why the percentage of women in the manual trades has remained stagnant for 30 years. Organisational barriers, such as informal recruitment and employment policies and practices derive from a gendered workplace culture that is seen to offer little flexibility or career support to women. It is implicated in creating informal masculinised workplaces that resist equity, diversity and social inclusion. Women's skills are devalued based on traditional gender stereotypes and social roles. Unfortunately, some women in these workplaces face discrimination and harassment. These findings indicate that without significant cultural change, increased government and industry incentives and strategies to support women's participation in the manual trades, the number of women in these roles will remain significantly disproportional.

## Barriers related to the recruitment of women

### (1) Societal and cultural

- ‘You can't be what you can't see'. Young women have few role models – as a result fewer girls (and their families) see the trades as a genuine career opportunity.
- The manual trades are perceived to be masculine occupations and girls/women seeking such career pathways go against societal and cultural norms of gender behaviour.
- Perceptions that women do not have the physical strength necessary, or the desire to undertake ‘dirty work’, dissuade stakeholders from considering or encouraging them.
- Parental concern for the physical and social safety of daughters entering trade occupations means they can discourage them from pursuing a trade.
- The continuing perception that women should carry the majority of domestic tasks impacts on their ability to achieve work-life balance in industries where work/home balance is not a consideration.
- High school curriculum results in fewer girls studying maths and science and fewer still gaining experience in trade-based classes and/or in the workplace through work experience programs.

- The favouring of university as a career pathway choice for girls by high school career advisers and parents results in career advice that steers them toward higher education and away from vocational education and training.

## **(2) Industry**

- Informal recruitment strategies are characteristic of the industry and occur through social networks not inclusive of women.
- Shallow recruiting pool: there is a genuine lack of applicants and small numbers of women applying for vacancies.
- Sole traders and small to medium sized trade-based businesses' lack of human resource skills and/or support for formal recruitment practices. Knowledge and practices regarding the effective employment of staff including: equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation, management of diversity and performance, are not regulated.
- Advertising does little to kindle awareness of the changing nature of the trades, to emphasise diverse career pathways, new and emerging opportunities and skills diversification and retraining.
- Limitations in formal advertising: lack of advertising that actively targets women or highlights positive examples of women in the trades; structure and language of advertisements reinforce masculine recruitment.

## **Barriers related to the retention of women**

### **(1) Industry/organisational cultural**

- Various complex factors contribute to the attrition of women in the trades. Industry identifies that apprentices and tradeswomen encounter multiple stakeholders throughout the apprenticeship and start to work – these include Registered Training Organisations (i.e. TAFE) including teachers, peers, management; work experience programs; supervisors, colleagues and contractors on worksites; Group Training Organisations and business. It is noted that support needs to be integrated and cross-collaborative to ensure that communication occurs across the nexus. Problems with stakeholders can be anticipated and avoided if stakeholders are aware and communicating.
- An issue influencing the low retention rate of women significantly (and also affecting men) is the lack of linear and lateral career support and development and/or defined career options for apprentices and tradeswomen. This occurs particularly for sole traders and those in small/medium sized business. Also of concern are the differing needs of employers vs employees. A factor that may occur is that career pathways throughout the industry may not be in the interests of employers who have invested in preliminary training for apprentices and expect long-term commitment to the organisation.
- Women who use appropriate channels to fight harassment, discrimination and spotlighting may be victimised/singled out, harassed and rejected by colleagues.
- A lack of flexibility and understanding of domestic responsibilities and associated work-life balance practices is a feature of the industry. This creates extra stress for women with these responsibilities (parental roles and related issues).
- A lack of on-site facilities i.e. lack of appropriate spaces for both sexes, toilets and change rooms. Women's privacy and personal safety may be at risk due to lack of facilities.
- A lack of suitable, affordable workwear uniform options for women including female designed and sized clothing and female footwear. This can have implications for escalated workplace, health and safety risks.

# Skillset – your future, our focus!

Skillset CEO and Apprentice Employment Network NSW/ACT Chair, Craig Randazzo, Jane McWilliam, Skillset General Manager and Jill Notzon, Skillset Recruitment Manager, participated in consultations held in Bathurst NSW in May 2018.

Skillset Ltd is a not-for-profit, Registered Group Training Organisation based in Bathurst. Skillset recruits, employs and supports apprentices and trainees for local businesses and employed 485 apprentices and trainees in 2018.

Skillset CEO Craig Randazzo has welcomed the Women in the Trades research, and says that understanding the barriers to women entering the trades, and how to overcome them, will provide valuable insights to the apprenticeship sector.



Skillset Electrical Apprentice Erin Hunter



**“Diversity has to be a goal of every workplace. Firstly, we have a responsibility to provide opportunities for young women in our communities to pursue their chosen career path, whatever that might be. And secondly, the benefits gender diversity delivers to the workplace have been well documented – so it just makes good business sense.”**

Skillset also delivers programs that support young people to engage in work and skills development. As a provider of the Australian Government’s Industry Specific Mentoring for Australian Apprentices program, Skillset also mentored an additional 1400 construction and mining apprentices across Central and Western NSW and the New England region in 2018. In addition, Skillset delivers Skills4Trade Pre Apprenticeship Programs and supports hundreds more young people to engage with trade training and work placements.

Skillset is in the incredibly privileged position to help literally thousands of young people every year get, or get through their apprenticeship or traineeship. Mr Randazzo says:

**“We would love to see more young women applying for trade apprenticeships, and welcome any initiatives that support that. There is no doubt women can excel in trade careers, and Skillset encourages any young women who are passionate about doing a trade to pursue their dream.”**

A shining example is Skillset Electrical Apprentice Erin Hunter. Erin, hosted by MRG Electrical, excelled throughout her apprenticeship and was awarded the TAFE NSW Bathurst Student of the Year 2017, Skillset Workforce Woman in Non-Traditional Trade Apprentice of the Year 2018, the 2018 Apprenticeship Employment Network NSW/ACT Group Training Woman in Non-Traditional Trade – Apprentice of the Year, and placed third in the 2018 National World Skills.



# Sullivan Project Group

## Dual income property specialist in Bathurst

Sullivan Project Group is unique in the building market. It focuses on designing homes that incorporate considered design and comfort with a focus on collaboration. The team consists of Dionie Sullivan, as the licensed builder, a Sydney-based design team and a passionate team of local tradies. Sullivan Project Group specialises in unique custom homes and also has a signature range of multi-generational home plans for extended families or an income stream.

**“Two residences under one roof is a no-brainer in the economy of buildings costs.”**



Since starting the business in 2016, Dionie has been breaking stereotypes in the traditionally male construction industry. She found a majority of women clients calling after poor experiences with male builders – they were not taken seriously or allowed flexibility in communication. Hence a demand was borne for a female-led company focused on women clients in the Bathurst area, where residential new home construction is flourishing.

Dionie grew up in a family with two generations of electrical trades and wood craftsmen and was dad's little apprentice from age 5, watching him build multiple family homes. After completing a Bachelor of Human Movement and a Bachelor of Business (Marketing) at Charles Sturt and travelling and volunteering on natural building and permaculture projects in England, Scotland, Turkey and Asia, Dionie reignited her passion for physical hands-on trade work and the outdoors lifestyle. As a 29 year old student, Dionie topped the class at Bathurst



TAFE, studying her Certificate IV in Building and Construction concurrently with the Certificate III in Carpentry and winning the Pooley Downing Memorial Trust Fund Award.

There were a few bullying and harassment experiences in the classroom which were quickly resolved with the support of the TAFE system, teachers, and some students. On the work sites, Dionie experienced challenges such as no bathroom amenities, no suitable female clothing and a tough masculine environment. This included sexism, sexual harassment and a culture of verbal bullying. The physical toll resulted in needing regular massages and acupuncture.

After sustaining a serious physical injury and finishing her apprenticeship under rehabilitation, Dionie worked in estimating for a large NSW builder. The experience she gained dealing with clients, consultants, learning marketing and sales planted the seed for Dionie to start her own company.

**“I'd like to see more female apprentices coming through the TAFE system with the support of local businesses and funding to create a decent living wage through the apprentice years.”**

Sullivan Project Group currently has a 4 Bed + 2 Bed Dual living home on the market at 36 Lew Avenue, Eglinton NSW.



## Barriers continued

### (2) Nature of the work

- A “macho culture” which supports traditional masculine attitudes exists in many workplaces in the construction and building industries. This culture can encourage risk taking at odds with current work, health and safety regulations, codes of practice and standards. It has been implicated, by industry, with initiating dangerous practices aimed at women.
- The sometimes dangerous nature of trade work heightens the exposure to incidents and injuries for both men and women. However, perceptions that women will experience more challenges are detrimental and overlook systems and practices designed to protect all workers’ health and safety.
- Small business and isolated worksites are often unable to have more than two people on-site at a time. This can create fears that there is a accentuated risk of sexual assault claims by women.

### (3) Resistance to women

- While some organisations are proactive and supportive of women entering trade occupations, there is significant variation in attitudes across the industries. Pockets of individual and team resistance to women workers are disadvantageous and lead to attrition.
- There can be a general lack of respect and lack of collegiality, usually related to traditional attitudes about gender roles, from older and younger male workers.
- Some men (peers and supervisors) lack experience and find it difficult interacting/communicating with women at work.
- Some men are overtly/covertly troublesome – bullying, harassing, and inappropriately aiming sexual language and comments at tradeswomen (this differs from using vulgar language).
- Different standards for men and women lead to discriminatory treatment based on gender (domestic responsibilities and related issues). Indirect discrimination may also occur when the same standards are applied despite different domestic responsibilities.



#### (4) Making gender the problem – focusing on ‘the woman’

- Tradeswomen experience extra scrutiny and surveillance in their work because of their gender. This can play out the perception that women lack capacity in general. Beliefs that women require and receive ‘special treatment’ single women out as problematic and are often unfounded. Micro-management, in the form of ‘surveillance’ may also hinder women’s learning and autonomy.
- Beliefs that women who don’t expect to be treated ‘differently’, ‘favourably’ and are ‘without expectation of receiving preferential treatment’ will be successful in the trades. This belief harbours a perception that many women have an expectation that they will receive preferential treatment and is unfounded.
- The perception that women must manage their gender to ‘fit in’ with the industry, to be ‘thick skinned’, able to ‘take a joke’, and ‘be one of the boys’ is seen to be common. These expectations are linked to attrition because they require women to ignore unacceptable levels of sexual objectification in the workplace.
- The industry generally lacks a realistic recognition of unconscious bias and male privilege. For example, tradesmen often feel they have to censor their behaviour or language to accommodate women i.e. not using foul language or sexualising women around them. This shows a lack of awareness about acceptable standards of workplace behaviour (including compliance with anti-bullying and sexual harassment legislation) that is commonplace in other industries.
- As the minority, women are highly visible – thus, their work has the potential to become a gender issue. For example, if a woman makes a mistake, it is seen as a gender capability issue and not as an individual one. In reverse, if a young man makes a mistake, it is about him as an individual, not about men’s capability generally. Some organisations use a negative experience with a woman apprentice as the reason not to employ women in the future.

#### Barriers related to education and training

- Vocation education and training (VET) lacks female teachers, mentors and role models.
- Manual trade classroom environments in VET institutions have been described as highly masculine. Language and behaviour can be disruptive and deliberately excludes female students.
- Currently apprenticeship training focuses on the skills and knowledge needed for entry into the occupation. There is an overall lack of consideration of career pathway training in trades occupations and a specific lack of attention to management skills.
- There is currently competition between School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) for state government funding based on student numbers. Diversification of training providers creates variations in the understanding of industry currency – including issues of equity, diversity and inclusion.





# Ladex Construction Group Pty Ltd



Grace Di Trapani, Sue-Ann Milliner & Natalie Creed



Richard Pottie, Managing Director of Ladex Construction Group Pty Ltd participated in consultations held in Wagga Wagga in March, 2018.

Ladex Construction Group Pty Ltd (Ladex) is a company based in the heart of the Riverina, specialising in commercial, retail and industrial construction sectors. Ladex has completed projects in Sydney, Newcastle, Dubbo, Yass, Goulburn, Canberra, Melbourne and many other areas including the Riverina, South West Slopes and Central West.

The Managing Director of Ladex, Richard Pottie, is supported by a team of around 50 staff with over 30 years of experience and varying backgrounds. This enables Ladex to offer clients extensive knowledge of local industry conditions and meet a variety of civil and construction needs, making Ladex one of the most trusted construction companies in the Riverina.

Ladex are proud members of prominent groups in Construction and Civil, including: the Master Builders Association, The Civil Contractors

Federation and groups in our district such as the Wagga Business Chamber and Committee 4 Wagga. This allows Ladex to share and absorb information to create a safe and fulfilled future for Construction, Civil and the wider Riverina area. Ladex is also supported by a network of business resources in various disciplines, including: drafting, engineering, surveying, accountancy, legal advice and insurance. Ladex believes in maintaining positive, long-term relationships with its network of business resources and clients.

Therefore, Ladex realises the advantage of conducting business in a professional manner and aims to service the Riverina and surrounding areas with quality finished projects no matter the size.

“Ladex believes profoundly in the power of equality on worksites in varying areas such as age, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual orientation and gender. Thus Ladex is honoured to join the percentage of construction and civil companies in Australia to employ female workers in traditional male roles.”

Currently, Ladex has women working in project management, carpentry and plant operation to add to its existing office staff. Ellena Zacharia came to Ladex as a junior project manager after graduating from Sydney University in Project Management (The Build of Environment). The experience she gained over several projects enabled her to gain employment back in Sydney with Multiplex.

Natalie Creed was Ladex's first female apprentice, starting in January 2016. Nat is in her 4th year studying Certificate III in Building and Construction at TAFE NSW Wagga. During her time at Ladex, Nat has worked on various jobs including childcare centres, defence, retail and housing. She describes her on site work as satisfying – she gets to see what she has achieved at the end of the day, week and project. Nat said she was lucky to have employers who gave her great work opportunities and she encouraged other women who were interested to give it a go. Nat would like to add a Certificate IV in building and construction to her training, qualifying her to be a licensed builder.

**“I got the opportunity, I took it and ever since it's been awesome” – Natalie**

Grace Di Trapani started her apprenticeship with Ladex in December 2017 and is now in her 2nd year studying Certificate III in Building and Construction at TAFE NSW Wagga. Grace has also completed varying projects such as childcare centres, defence, retail and housing. Grace always wanted to give Construction a try and loves working ‘on the tools’. She loves seeing more women in construction and hopes to eventually further her studies in project management but for now is happy working on-site.

Sue-Ann Milliner started at Ladex in November 2017 and has flourished, working on various projects, including the new NSW Harness Racing Track. Sue also joined the Women in Civil Program hosted by the Civil Contractors Federation. Through that program, Sue, works with a mentor who encourages and advises her as she navigates her journey in civil. Sue has used this experience to encourage and support other apprentices and work experience students who have joined Ladex on-site.

It is through the inclusion of women in trades that Ladex believes it has been able to expand as a company and create a new standard of employment that it hopes to see grow and spread to other companies in a few short years.



Grace Di Trapani and Natalie Creed





# Solutions

## Strategies to increase women's employment in the trades and building resilience

During the consultation process, stakeholders identified several possible solutions to overcoming the barriers to the recruitment and retention of women in male-dominated trades. Stakeholders identified tried and proven methods that operate to achieve a more gender diverse workforce that go well beyond the expectation that women should just 'fit in'. They also posed some innovative and original theories and ideas. Some industry stakeholders expressed the belief that businesses are more profitable when there is diversity in the workforce and this is driving the motivation for organisational change at many levels. Many parts of the sector are thinking about how they can encourage and sustain women and support resilience.

The following points offer strategies to provide women with opportunities to work (i.e. be recruited) and succeed (achieve longevity in the trades). These are organised into the following themes: Challenging social norms about gender roles and work; education and training; social networking; diversity is good for the industry; government and industry strategies; workplace and organisational strategies and advertising.

### (1) Challenging social norms about gender roles and work is required to change the perception that the trades are only for men

- Community education programs– earlier engagement with girls through community/industry advocacy, sponsorship and support of women in trades to improve community acceptance (organisations such as SALT and Women's Sheds have started work in this area).
- Social media marketing campaigns can highlight success stories of women in trades and the benefits that accrue to the organisation, the individual and the community from a number of perspectives (i.e. diversity, increasing client base, enhanced productivity).
- Social media strategies can address the disconnection between perceptions and actual job requirements in the trades. This could transmit the message that technological advancements, mechanisation and modernisation of equipment have decreased the need for physical strength in the trades. The work remains physical in nature but women are no longer prohibited from trades work based on physique.



## **(2) Education and Training**

- Awareness and recognition of the role schools can play in placing students into apprenticeships.
- Work with schools to:
  - Promote trades for girls as a desirable career option (on equal footing with university).
  - Use the support of careers advisers – offer more training opportunities to establish knowledge of potential trades pathways.
  - Improve the image of VET and the trades by valuing and celebrating student attainment of positions in VET.
- VET institutions to:
  - Increase the number of qualified female trades' teachers to mentor and provide role-modelling.
  - Include basic business, HR management skills as well as equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation training.
  - Provide explicit information to assist apprentices to understand potential career progression and career development opportunities.

## **(3) Social networking**

- Families with trades' industry connections have been shown to provide pathways for girls into the trades. Industry could increase awareness of these social network pathways.
- Encourage women to form good social networks, join social media networks and join other, informal networks available through work.

## **(4) Diversity is good for the industry**

- Challenge and change the perception that integrating women into the trades is primarily for women by accentuating the benefits for industry. This could take the form of promoting findings such as:
  - Diverse workforces increase business profitability.
  - Women embrace safer work practices which improves the workplace for all.
  - Work cultures that promote and strive for diversity (based on gender and ethnicity) have greater social cohesion, less conflict and embrace change more readily. This affects both women and men positively and creates a feeling of safety for all workers.
  - Encourage the employment of mature age women who have been found to be successful, resilient and able to manage challenging industry culture.

## **(5) Government and industry strategies**

- Government engagement with identified stakeholders to enhance appropriate incentives (for employers, apprentices and education providers).
- Develop and implement support and initiatives to assist the trade apprenticeship process of attraction and retention (for both women and men).
- Industry and government establish trades scholarships particularly targeting categories; such as women and those in regional and remote areas.
- Education campaigns for employers focusing on:
  - Cultural change on worksites,
  - Business management generally as well as benefits associated with employing women, coaching for employers about the induction of trainees/apprentices to the workplace. Such campaigns should be free and can be placed on government websites.

# Cassy's Coatings

Cassy Shanahan participated in the consultations held in Albury in October 2018. Cassy Shanahan's painting and decorating business, called Cassy's Coatings paints mostly residential homes in Albury/Wodonga and surrounding areas. Cassy offers several painting and decorating services, including: repaints, renovations and restorations. Cassy absolutely loves to restore old buildings. She says that making a building or object look new again is a great experience.

Cassy began her Painting and Decorating apprenticeship at 19 and for the next 4 years, she was the only girl in her class and on worksites. Cassy travelled 1.5 hours each way to attend TAFE and despite feeling that she didn't fit in, persevered because she wanted to learn how to master painting. Once qualified, Cassy felt she could achieve anything! And for the following 5 years, Cassy worked for various local painting businesses.

Cassy describes her time as a tradie as "not easy" because of her gender, not her capabilities! Painting is hard physical work and it took a while for her to adjust to the physicality of the job. But Cassie also had to toughen up mentally. She endured sexist/rude/outdated comments and had listen to people tell her why she shouldn't be on worksites. Cassy found the endless comments wore her down but luckily she had people who believed in her, even when she didn't believe in herself. She says, even the practicalities were made uncomfortable because everything is designed for men: the tools, the clothes and so on. With her support network and a fair amount of dedication and determination, Cassy toughed it out and continued doing the work she loved – painting.

Cassy soon tired of life as an employee and dreamed of new challenges. She started her own painting business in 2018. Some people were sceptical, thinking she shouldn't take the risk but luckily, she didn't bother listening to them!

Cassy's Coatings is now in its 2nd year of business. It can be hard work, particularly as TAFE offers only the basic business skills to students but Cassy loves it and is good at it! Her 'can do' attitude really helps and managing her own business allows Cassy the space to create the life she wants to have. Cassy takes great pride in her work and gets a lot of

satisfaction from fixing and painting someone's home – bringing it new life.

Around the Albury/Wodonga region, Cassy is affectionately known as the "Lady Tradie" and has those words stickered on her work ute and tattooed on her arm. Cassy's attitude is **"I belong here just as much as a man, so just accept it and move on."**

Cassy hopes to continue running a successful business for a long time and loves painting. It helps to have a supportive partner and family. Cassy also takes great pleasure in smashing gender stereotypes and the different standards that some people have for men and women. She embraces the work and it's not always 'female friendly' environment and hopes her presence will make a difference to other young women:

**"I never thought of myself as a role model before, but now I'm glad if other girls/boys see me and realise 'if she can do it, then so can I'. I'll keep kicking goals and inspiring others."**





# John B Electrical

John B Electrical is a well-established company providing electrical services to homes and businesses throughout the north east of Victoria and south east of NSW. With more than 20 years' experience, John B Electrical is committed to providing a clean, punctual and reliable service. Owned and operated by Rohan Hansford and family, the company has grown from strength to strength. John B has four staff and everyday tasks involve general and industrial electrical maintenance and installation, and also security installations like CCTV and alarm systems.

Bridget Smith completed her apprenticeship with Rohan and has been a qualified electrician for three years. Without any family or friends connected to the trades, Bridget was drawn to electrical through her love of physics and mathematics. There was family pressure to go to university but Bridget decided a pre-apprenticeship year (the theoretical side of electrical) would help her decide if this was the right path. During that time, she completed work experience at John B. After Rohan couldn't find an apprentice who measured up, he offered Bridget the position. Rohan suggested Bridget do a year on the tools because she hadn't had much on-site experience. Bridget describes this lack of experience as not being much of a tomboy. She has had very good support from Rohan who encouraged her to be herself and not change her behaviour. Rohan says:

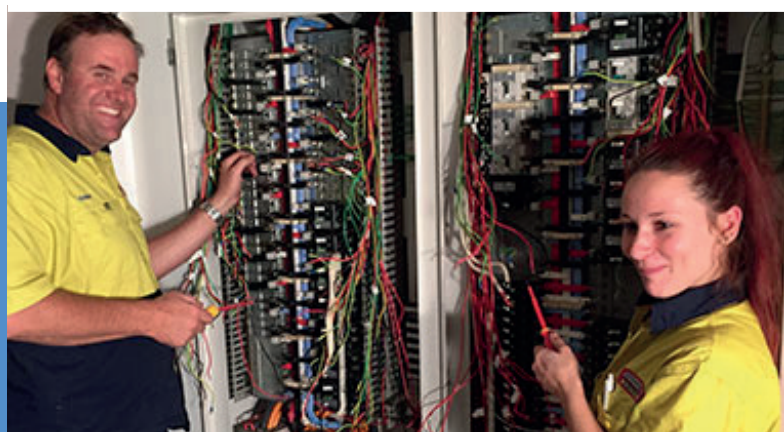
**"Bridget was a natural when it came to building sites, she didn't get intimidated by all the guys and in fact, the site became much less coarse while Bridget was on-site. Guys controlled their language and were very respectful of the fact that a lady was on-site, it was a rare eye opener for me."**

Bridget says clients are always surprised to find out that she's qualified. She recalls a time when she and her 17 year old apprentice, Matt,

visited a client and they thought he was in charge because Bridget looks younger and is shorter! At eight years Matt's senior, Bridget soon lets clients know who's in charge and says once she starts talking clients are really interested and supportive.

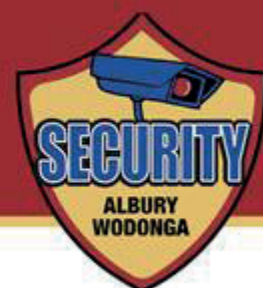
Bridget has been on worksites with other tradeswomen which she says was great fun. Bridget is keen to recruit another young woman to the John B team! In the future, Bridget hopes to further her qualifications and even teach her trade at TAFE. She thinks having women role models with practical experience in teaching roles would make it much easier for young women in the classroom, and probably be good for young men as well.

Bridget is currently on maternity leave and undecided about her return, Rohan hopes she will come back and pick up where she left off.



**JOHN B**  
**ELECTRICAL**

- Electrical contractors
- Security System / CCTV installs
- Repair, Installation & maintenance







## Solutions continued

- While Training Services NSW, Apprenticeships Australia, group training providers, and recruitment and placement agencies currently provide sole traders, small business and apprentices with support and resources in the provision of HR, WHS and encouraging gender equity in the workplace, these are limited in regional areas across significant geographical areas. More targeted resources would assist with:
  - Compliance with employment legislation,
  - Best practice guidelines for employing staff. Some of these are available, such as on the Fair Work Ombudsman website, but targeted marketing and awareness sessions would ensure stakeholders, particularly small businesses, are adequately informed.
- Requests were made for resources on issues such as:
  - Codes of etiquette – appropriate workplace for both sexes (including on-site facilities, apprentice matching, diversity inclusion programs, quotas in government contracts, support services for employers and employees and equal pay for equal worth).
- Industry bodies to be more responsible for developing frameworks for the career development of trainees/apprentices. Women apprentices need:
  - Gender aware and friendly processes,
  - Mentoring on-site,
  - Commitment by stakeholders for safe, fair and equitable treatment.
- Implement and monitor a system of ‘best practice’ criteria to provide support and resources to organisations with low completion rates.
- In addition to existing risk management strategies, a system of ‘essential HR and WHS criteria’ for organisations to meet before apprenticeship placement be implemented and monitored to ensure organisations are ready and can safely support apprentices to completion.

## (6) Workplace and organisational strategies

- Create a culture of support in HR for gender equality so organisations:
  - Understand gender equality, what it means to be an equal opportunity employer,
  - Implement flexibility, job rotation and stability of employment, including leave (parental and carers leave for women and men),

- Challenge unconscious bias and masculine privilege,
- Manage sexist issues and implement work practices that avoid making gender the problem.
- Formalise mentoring programs and integrate support systems – not just other women but educate and support male supervisors to mentor women and men through a structured program:
  - Mentors, champions,
  - Networking and connecting with other groups – women who are ‘on the tools’ share experiences,
  - All women teams,
  - Opportunities for support on site – contact officer programs that are not direct supervisor or HR, buddy systems.
- Include diversity and inclusion programs:
  - Accommodate cultural differences,
  - Actively minimise ‘spotlighting’ where women are highly visible,
  - Implement and meet quotas to gain diversity balance.
- Career structure and pathways – opportunities for promotion:
  - Encourage women to apply for leadership positions – having women in management positions can inspire women to enter the trades,
  - Careers advice that enables women to look after their bodies (‘bodily maintenance’).
- Education, training and professional development:
  - Access to further skills and technological training and education for tradespeople as they progress,
  - Access to assertiveness, communication and emotional intelligence training,
  - Training for unconscious bias (Anecdote: Aptitude testing where women excelled in testing and interview skills but still ranked lower than male counterparts).

## (7) Advertising

- Promote positive examples of women in trades.
- Emphasise the changing nature of the trades – normalise trades occupations for women – they are no longer ‘dirty work’ but developing new and emerging opportunities.
- Decode recruitment advertisements (placement, structure, language) to reduce male-dominated wording and attract more women.
- Promote success stories.



## Where to from here?

The consolidated findings across three comprehensive industry stakeholder consultations held in Albury, Bathurst and Wagga Wagga during 2018 revealed several possible solutions to overcome the barriers to the recruitment and retention of women in the trades. This report offers a summary of strategies that will provide women with opportunities to work (i.e. be recruited) and succeed (stay in the trades). They all involve change. Change to social and cultural perceptions of gender and gender roles, valuing women's skills and contribution to the trades; changes to the way we deliver education and training and who delivers it; integrating women for the good of industry; increasing support and developing targeted resources from government and industry; changing organisational working practices to improve the industry culture for all stakeholders.

These solutions will impact on the persistent barriers to women's recruitment and retention in the manual trades. It is evident that gender equality initiatives and broader organisational policies need to address barriers that impact on women. Our analysis of the barriers discussed by industry stakeholders indicates that success is a complex integration of individual and organisational resilience as well as the right combination of education, social inclusion, support services and organisational practices. Much of the support currently aimed toward facilitating women's success in the trades is uncoordinated across industry stakeholders and many of the concerns raised in this report are ongoing.

Industry stakeholders told us that they would benefit from more education about employing women. This includes being armed with information about inducting and coaching apprentices, strategies for following up with support, clear guidelines, and policies and procedures that are accessible to employers. It is also important to implement a generic code of etiquette for all employees so that expectations are clear and understood. Many in the industry want a work environment that is appropriate and safe for both sexes. Creating a safer workforce where mechanisation replaces the need for heavy lifting protects the bodies of all employees. Progress can be enabled by employers, HR departments and managers who understand gender equality and what it means to be an equal opportunity employer. And by policies such as parental leave that benefit both women and men. Dealing with issues such as career flexibility for people with young families is responsive to a changing social demographic.

More research is required to track these issues and to determine whether improvements made in the industry are enduring.

Our continuing research investigates:

1. What are the lived experiences of women tradespersons in male-dominated industries in trade-based occupations in regional Australia?
2. What strategies do women and organisations adopt to negotiate the barriers to attraction for women working in the trades, how do they cultivate resilience and facilitate the retention of women in trades?



# What's happening in our region?

## Community leadership

- **Apprenticeship Support Networks** – Actively recruiting women apprentices and working with government and industry.
- **Newcrest Mining Ltd Cadia Valley Operations** – Contact officer programs; diversity and inclusion programs; targets for women in leadership and other roles; advertising initiatives: web-based tools check for gender bias, helps attract more, and more diverse, good candidates.
- **LADEX Construction Group** – Successfully employing and mentoring female apprentices.
- **Master Builders Association** – supporting women in trades through:
  - Women in Construction breakfast/luncheons at MBA regional offices in Ulladulla, Merimbula, Central Coast, Port Macquarie, Orange and Newcastle.
  - Features regular articles in the Master Builder magazine (MBA NSW), such as: 'Empowering Women to Thrive in the Construction Industry' (Issue 2 2018); 'Graduation for Empowering Women program' (Issue 3, 2018); 'Be Unstoppable – empowering women to thrive program' (Issue 6, 2018); 'A Day In the Life Of A Building Biologist' – curing the building industry from 'sick' building syndrome (Issue 2, 2018) and 'Time's up for Sexual Harassment in Workplace' (Issue 5, 2018) <https://www.mbansw.asn.au/media/master-builder-magazine>
- **Orange City Council, Albury City Council & Wagga Wagga City Council** – Taking the lead on changing community perceptions – mentoring women in non-traditional roles; networking and women in leadership programs: building confidence, building resilience in management. Wagga Wagga City Council has a Bronze Award for local government 50-50 women in leadership roles.
- **Skillset Ltd** – One of the highest rates of female apprenticeship placement in the state – above national average.
- **Supporting and Linking Tradeswomen (SALT)** – Over 200 Skill Women workshops conducted in Women's Sheds and schools across five states (NSW, SA, VIC, ACT and QLD). 160 presentations in schools supporting trades a career choice for women. <https://saltaustralia.org.au/>
- **TAFE NSW** – Taking the lead on changing community perceptions – publicising women in trades media outreach.
- **Training Services NSW** – Supporting and advancing apprenticeships between government and industry.
- **Benalla Rural City Council and Wangaratta Govt Centre** – 'Try-a-trade' Days.
- **Women's Sheds** – Supported by councils. Up-skilling and empowering women and girls.





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