

Aboriginal Careers Day Expo
27th June 2008 Maclean High School

Mayor's presentation

I commence thanking Auntie Judy Breckenridge for her welcome to Yaegl country and I pay respect to Yaegl Elders past and present.

It is a pleasure to be here to speak with you today about careers. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Clarence Valley now comprises a population of about 51,000 people and is growing at about 500 people per annum. The aboriginal community represents almost 5% of this population or approximately 2,500 people.

Traditionally the valley has had a very high unemployment level of well over 10% with youth indigenous employment much higher. Fortunately this level of unemployment is on the decline and the most recent figures place the level of unemployment below 7% and still declining. This is good news for anyone looking for future work in the Valley.

The council in recent years has become very pro-active in fostering growth in employment opportunities in the valley. To this end Council has have undertaken considerable initiatives in both the planning area and through our economic development plan, known as 'Clarence edge'. As well Council has identified particular needs in increasing aboriginal involvement in council decision making and employment opportunities.

On the issue of fostering employment in the wider valley Council has completed an economic strategic plan which is about increasing economic activity in the Clarence valley. Through this plan we are working on initiatives to attract new businesses to the valley, and working with key existing industries in sugar, timber, marine, transport and education to increase job opportunities and training. We have also

identified large new areas for housing growth and new industrial areas in our various strategic plans.

One very relevant economic development program is 'Career Link' where council has been working with the education department, TAFE and Southern Cross University, to link school based curriculum in years 10 to 12 to local industry skill needs. So far we have worked on new options for aged care and community nursing, marine industries and electro-technology. In the near future we are going to work on options in the service industries (e.g. supermarkets) and construction. About 60 students are engaged in the Career Link Program at present. In addition there will be future emphasis on a special indigenous Career Link Program.

I think Career Link is very exciting in that it allows school based students to not only get up to certificate 2 levels in trade areas by the end of year 11 but also enables students, generally one day a week, to work with local business's (and get paid). Hopefully the employer will in the future then employ the student; either as a full time apprentice or after the student completes university.

I encourage any student who gets a chance to get involved in the Career Link program.

I always emphasise the most important thing you can do to get a future job is to do well at school. It is well proven a good higher school certificate equips you very well for future jobs or future study. In this regard it is very pleasing to see a large increase in the number of aboriginal students in our valley completing the higher school certificate and going on to university.

I will now turn to what council is doing specifically to help employment of aboriginal people. Council is the largest single employer in the Clarence Valley. We recognise not only our importance as a potential

employer of aboriginal people but also the positive outcomes they can achieve for council. Everyone benefits - local people are employed locally and continue to contribute to the life and prosperity of our community and council is better able to engage with our aboriginal community and meet their specific needs.

Council has a goal of ensuring that eventually at least 5% of its employees are aboriginal – to match the proportion of our community who are aborigines. And we are really focused on achieving that goal. Council's aboriginal consultative committee which is made up of community members from each of our aboriginal communities, has recommended that council develop a strategy that identifies specific activities we could undertake to increase the number of aboriginal people working for council. With input and advice from the community, employment services as well as aboriginal people who are currently employed by council, that strategy is well advanced.

Council's Aboriginal Employment Strategy will include specific measures to attract aboriginal people to apply for positions with council, to support them in their positions with council and to help them develop career paths. We recently employed 7 aboriginal people in various positions across council – customer service, administration, parks officers, water cycle and roads. This was a specific drive to move closer to our goal of 5% of council staff being aboriginal. These employees will benefit immediately from the strategy and they will also recommend to Council how it might make continuous improvements for future indigenous employees.

Council work conditions are generally very attractive with flexible working arrangements, superannuation to ensure an income in retirement, generous leave entitlements and study assistance so that employees can improve their qualifications. While we do have some minimum

requirements that applicants must meet in order to get a position with council, we also offer many opportunities for individuals to learn and develop skills when they are employed with us. Council hosts trade apprenticeships in carpentry, mechanics, electrician, horticulture as well as traineeships in planning, libraries, aged care, engineering and business. This means that you learn while you are employed – so you are not expected to have all the skills for a job before you start.

We also offer work experience opportunities so that you can get an idea of what it's like to work for council while you are still at school and thinking about different careers and work options. . In addition council through its large construction projects is employing aboriginal trainees. For example four aboriginal trainees were employed as part of the construction of the Shannon Creek dam. Three of these trainee's are still employed and it is likely Leighton constructions who are building the dam, will offer these trainees full time employment.

All that said, there is a lot of competition in gaining employment with council. Council has just received 62 applications for a part-time position in one of our libraries. That's great for Council because we know that we will secure a very suitable person from that large pool of people.

What does that mean for you? It means that you have to stand out. Council needs to be impressed and be confident that you will be the right person for the job. How do you do that? Complete your education and do so to the very best of your ability. Show that you have pride in yourself, want to do your best and want to achieve. You may not have your full career path mapped out at this early stage in your life, but your enthusiasm and commitment to explore opportunities will help you to develop a pathway, and it will impress a prospective employer.

I wish each of you all the very best in job seeking.

Ian Tiley Mayor Clarence Valley Council