



# 2019– 2020

## ANNUAL REVIEW

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Changing lives, strengthening  
communities

Fostering employment opportunities  
in rural and regional Queensland

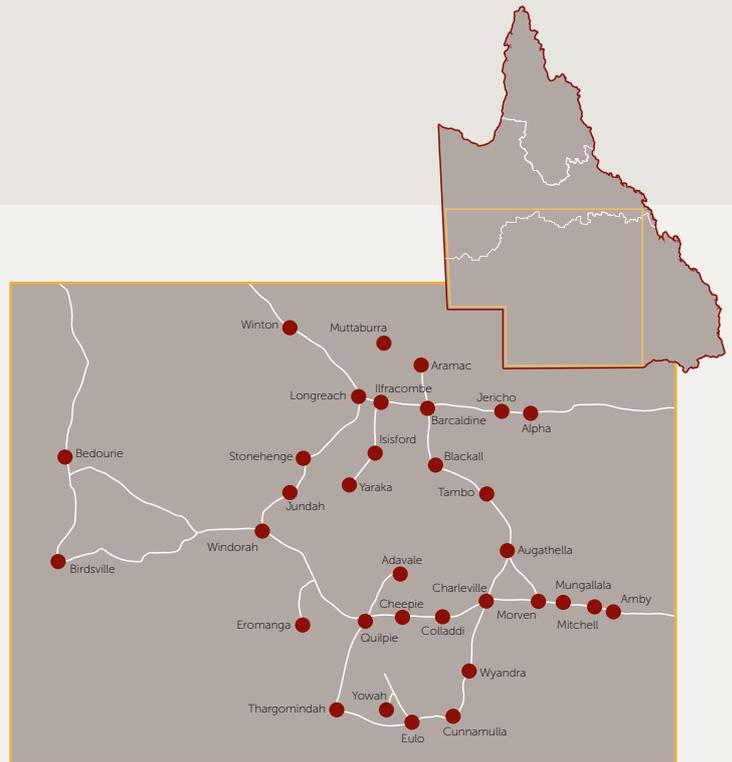
# Our region

**RESQ Plus is the employment service provider for Central West and South West Queensland. These two areas form one of Australia's largest and most diverse geographic regions in which community-based employment services are delivered.**

Our program area covers almost 800,000 km<sup>2</sup>, with approximately 20,000 residents from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our work is supported by the eleven surrounding regional councils of Barcaldine Regional Council, Barcoo Shire Council, Blackall Regional Council, Bulloo Shire Council, Diamantina Shire Council, Longreach Regional Council, Maranoa Regional Council, Murweh Shire Council, Paroo Shire Council, Quilpie Shire Council and Winton Shire Council.

Over 40 RESQ Plus employees work hard to cover this vast region and its varied employment and training needs. Together, they provide vital support services to 32 communities and over 1000 job seekers.



## Board profiles



### **Maria Richards**

**Chairperson, The MaraWay**

Maria Richards has come a long way from her challenging experiences as a schoolgirl. She is now a Director of RESQ Plus and the Chair of The MaraWay in Cairns. Maria is passionate about her culture, her family and the community. She believes if you want something in life, you have to work for it.

A former Community Development Employment Projects participant, Maria used the program as a stepping stone to a better education, job, and life. Maria has a firsthand understanding of the barriers encountered by Indigenous youth.

Maria has fostered over 65 children and is determined to use her leadership roles to help people embrace life-changing opportunities.



### **Janeece Thompson**

**Manager, CWAC**

Janeece Thompson is a proud Bidjara/Kara Kara Aboriginal woman from Barcaldine in Central Queensland. Over the past 20 years, Janeece has been managing the Central West Aboriginal Corporation (CWAC), an organisation founded by her parents in 1976.

Janeece shares the same passion and determination as her parents and original members of CWAC. She has seen many changes, celebrated many successes, and has helped shape the Corporation into a successful and well-respected organisation.

In her role as a Director of RESQ Plus, Janeece sees an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to sustain economic independence, now and in the future.



### **Alicia Gibson**

**Chief Executive Officer,  
Skill Centred Queensland**

As a Board Director of RESQ Plus founding partner, Employment Services Queensland (ESQ), and CEO of Skill Centred Queensland, a not-for-profit community-based organisation operating across Queensland, Alicia brings years of experience in organisations supporting long-term unemployed, disadvantaged youth and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

She holds various qualifications, including a Bachelor of Social Welfare (Youth Work) and an Associate Diploma in Welfare Studies. Alicia is currently completing her Masters in Business. She sits on a variety of boards within her local community.

# Message from the Chairman

It is with pleasure that I offer this report to our clients, stakeholders including government, fellow directors and their organisations, the CEO and staff.

It has been another rewarding year for RESQ Plus. Before going further, I'd like to recognise the outgoing CEO, Tony Rayner, and the incoming CEO, Chris Hamilton.

Tony handed over a very effective and professionally run operation. Chris has since picked up where Tony left off. Behind these two, however, is a very competent staff, some of whom have been with the organisation since inception. I would like to pass on my recognition of all staff equally.

This year has seen a number of key achievements. We welcomed Sue Bylett, our new Regional Manager for the South West Queensland (SWQ) region. Other SWQ achievements of note include:

- The Indigenous Artist in Residence Project in Cunnamulla. Two of our Indigenous job seekers were employed over six months using funding from the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) to create artwork and deliver art classes to other job seekers.
- The Business Incubator Project. To date, this program has connected seven Indigenous job seekers with new business ventures based on their own ideas. These businesses have now established a steady client base and are generating income for all involved.
- A landscape supply business that collects and cuts firewood for locals is looking into developing a landscape service throughout the warmer months. So far, four job seekers are involved in setting it up.

We continue our operations in the Central West Queensland (CWQ) region with equivalent dedication and enthusiasm. Activities of note include:

- The partnership with Red Ridge in Blackall continues to go from strength to strength with the refurbishment of the old Commonwealth Bank of Australia building. Red Ridge is a success story in its own right, commencing as an outcome from



## The organisation's achievements are a testament to the staff's dedication and commitment

- the CICADAS@RAPAD arts program many years ago to become a sustainable and innovative arts and cultural group.
- RESQ Plus supported the Outback Watersports Club with the setup of the Premiere Outback Paddle Regatta last year, which was a huge success locally.
- RESQ Plus also supported the Outback Food, Wine and Music Festival, helping set up last year's premiere event at the Cattleman's Bar & Grill.
- With support from the Red Rose Foundation, RESQ Plus commenced the Red Bench Project, an initiative to raise awareness about Domestic Violence and encourage victims and their families to seek support.

Again, I'd like to acknowledge all of our staff who carried on with activities as normal, despite the impacts of COVID-19 on the business and our communities. Now, more than ever, an effective job seeker support program is important.

The organisation's achievements are a testament to the staff's dedication and commitment, not only to the organisation but to the clients and regions we serve. In closing, I also give recognition to my fellow directors, without whom, the effective governance of the organisation would not take place.

**David Arnold**  
*Chief Executive Officer,  
Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) and  
Chairman of RESQ Plus*

# Message from the Chief Executive Officer

## Welcome to the 2019–2020 Annual Review.

As RESQ Plus's newly appointed Chief Executive Officer, I must say that I am honoured to have been chosen for the role ahead of many other talented people. On a more personal level, it is great to be able to return to the bush after so many years away, working in "the big smoke".

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding achievements of my predecessor Tony Rayner in establishing the business in 2013 and his work as its custodian for the past six and a half years.

Tony decided to step aside to concentrate on his bid for Mayor of the Longreach Regional Council. I am pleased to say that Tony was successful and is now busier than ever in his new role. Congratulations Tony! We thank you for what you have done during your time at RESQ and RESQ Plus and we wish you every success in your new role.

There is no doubt that the key topic of conversation for 2020 is COVID-19 and the impact that the raft of restrictions has had on individuals, families and businesses. While the virus has significantly affected the lives of many, we should not forget that here in western Queensland, COVID-19 has exacerbated the impact of pre-existing tough economic conditions.

The drought has not eased in most areas. Those businesses that were struggling continue to do so and now, due to the lack of a tourist season, more businesses find themselves in difficulties through no fault of their own.

However, it is not all doom and gloom. We know that a strong and diversified economy relies upon a sustainable supply of skilled and unskilled workers. Jobs and employment matter. When a good supply of workers is combined with high levels of community support, it is possible to create profitable and sustainable regional businesses.

As the regions focus on the post-COVID-19 human, social and economic recovery efforts, the role that RESQ Plus plays in assisting this recovery becomes increasingly important. The RESQ Plus team are a group of client-focused professionals who have a detailed understanding of job seekers' aspirations, goals and barriers. They thrive on the challenges of working with their clients, and they take great satisfaction in placing people into paid employment and watching their lives change for the better.

Combining the collective experience of RESQ Plus, our Indigenous partners, Central West Aboriginal Corporation and The MaraWay with our strong and well-developed community partnerships, we have created a variety of work experiences that are healthy, socially responsible and culturally rewarding. All our activities are designed to get people working again.

Our programs assist those seeking work to gain the skills, confidence and the right attitude to see them enter or re-enter the workforce. Quality post-placement support then helps them stay in employment and identifies any additional training required to help them grow in their role.

During the year under review, RESQ Plus has found employment for 136 job seekers since July 2019 and supported over 32 community organisations. You can read all about these fantastic achievements in the following pages.

### **Chris Hamilton**

*Chief Executive Officer, RESQ Plus*



Congratulations Tony! We thank you for what you have done during your time at RESQ and RESQ Plus and we wish you every success in your new role



*Tony Rayner (left) hands over the reins to new RESQ Plus CEO Chris Hamilton.*

# Building skills and strong communities

RESQ Plus is proud to continue delivering the Community Development Program (CDP) in South West and Central West Queensland's regional communities.

The CDP is a remote employment and development service funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency. The program helps job seekers in remote Australia build skills, address challenges and contribute to their communities through a range of flexible programs.

As local providers, RESQ Plus acts as a single point of contact for job seekers, employers and host organisations.

RESQ Plus Chief Executive Officer Chris Hamilton says their organisation is there to help clients overcome any barriers to employment.

"We support people with their job applications and resumes, then continue to work with them after they've found employment.

"The CDP allows us to provide six months of post-placement support to job seekers and their employers."

RESQ Plus also refers job seekers to other supporting agencies and training organisations.

"We can identify the skills required by employers and pay for training that will help job seekers gain employment.

"We can also help job seekers with specialised support. For example, we can help them address difficulties with language, literacy and numeracy or drug and alcohol dependencies.

"Whatever barriers someone is facing, we can work with them to open up a pathway to employment."

Across regional Queensland, employers are reaping the rewards of the program. Using subsidies and retention bonuses, local businesses and organisations are creating new ongoing jobs for CDP participants.

These jobs increase the capacity of the remote workforce and support the development of more local businesses. They also help CDP participants access wages, paid superannuation and other entitlements from their employer.

Over the past seven years, RESQ Plus has connected over 650 job seekers with employment through the CDP.

Chris Hamilton says the RESQ Plus team works hard to find activities that help job seekers realise their goals and aspirations.

"We work with participants to find activities that mean something to them, their families and communities. This program empowers people and can help them find stable jobs."

For further information about the CDP, get in touch with RESQ at [resqld.com.au](http://resqld.com.au)

## Paving the way to employment

RESQ Plus can organise a range of training, including:

- Language, literacy and numeracy
- Licensing
- TAFE qualifications relevant to employment
- Chainsaw and tree felling
- Chemical handling accreditation
- Side-by-side ATV training
- Tractor operations
- First-aid certification
- General construction white card certification
- Responsible service of alcohol
- Responsible service of gambling
- Welding

## Working with real people for real impact

Connecting with  
JOB SEEKERS

**750+**

people supported with a pathway to employment\*

Connecting with  
COMMUNITIES

**32+**

local communities

Connecting people  
with EMPLOYERS

**136+**

people placed in jobs\*

\*since 1 July 2019

# Making a creative difference

A regional partnership between Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd and RESQ Plus continues to drive employment diversity and opportunities in regional Queensland.

The Lost Art is an arts and craft-based project that actively supports job seekers, promotes social inclusion for disadvantaged groups and is a recognised activity as part of the Community Development Program (CDP).

Job seekers participate in a vibrant arts community, making traditional leather crafts and sharing stories of history and heritage.

Handmade crafts such as stockman's whips and hatbands, plaited belts, tobacco pouches and coin purses are sold from The Lost Art studio in Blackall to locals and tourists. All funds generated are returned to the program for purchasing local goods and services and paying rent.

For communities, the program offers enriching volunteer opportunities and training to upskill and become job-ready.

RESQ Plus Business Operations Manager Jade Smith says The Lost Art project makes a significant contribution to the social and economic welfare of the community.

"It changes people's lives and encourages creativity."

"This social enterprise attracts interest from communities all through remote Queensland, and celebrates previously unrecognised talent."

Red Ridge Manager Louise Campbell says she hopes the program empowers the values and traditions of local people.

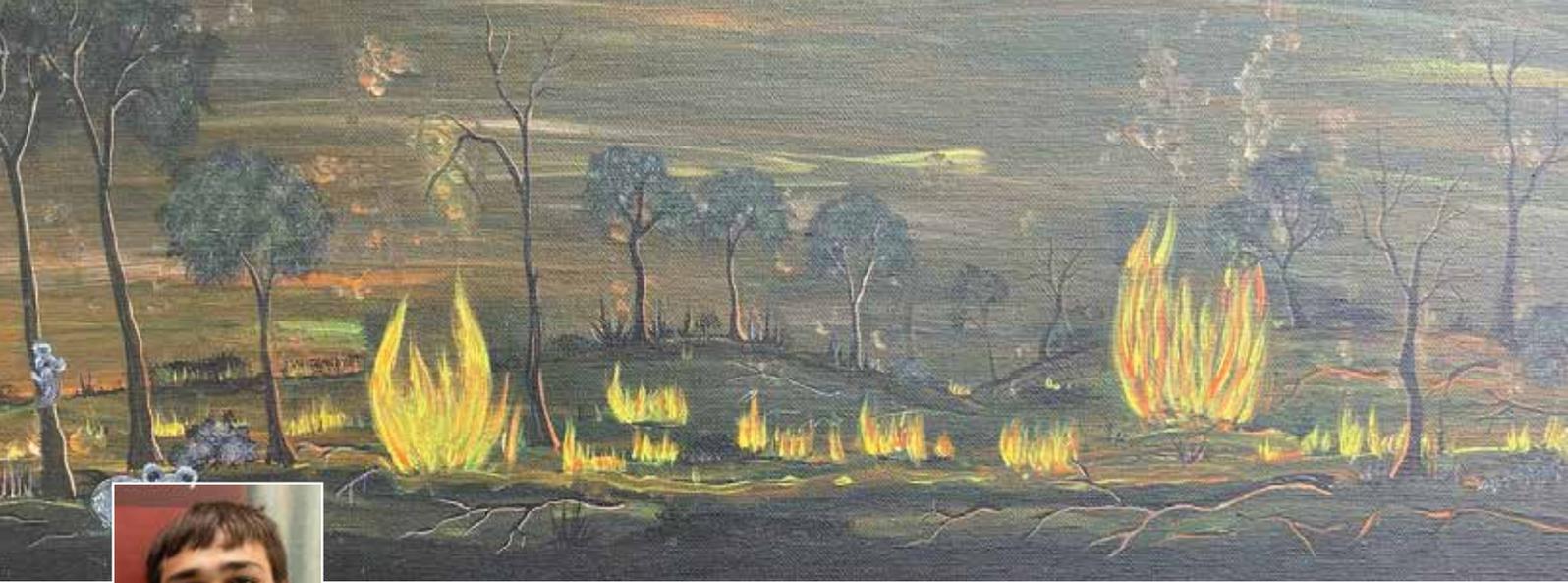
"The Lost Art project helps sustain the stories and narratives of community elders, encourages the passing of traditional skills and helps form vital relationships within the community."

"It also teaches young people entrepreneurial skills, from the making of a product through to final retailing."



Clockwise from top left: Job seeker Jonathan Parfitt creates amazing pyrography; leather goods at The Lost Art studio; constructing wire dog sculptures.





Murawai artist, Kirk Mitchell and one of his paintings.

## Encouragement for artistic expression

Last year, artists Kirk Mitchell and Darryl Mitchell were selected for the Indigenous Artist in Residence (IAIR) roles in Cunnamulla.

The IAIR is funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) as part of the Jobs, Land and Economy Programme.

The program supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to find work or run their own business, and provide for themselves and their families.

The artists were engaged to work with Indigenous job seekers to produce paintings and sculptures inspired by the Cunnamulla region.

Each artist worked with two or three job seekers each week. Participants were taught how to mix colours, use paintbrushes with correct brush strokes, and achieve scale and perspective in dot and free-form paintings.

They were also shown how to use natural materials, such as animal skins, shells, bird eggs and feathers in their design.

RESQ Plus provided tools, equipment and basic materials, including paint, frames, canvasses and locally sourced timber. They also worked with the artists and participants to develop a marketing, sales and distribution strategy for the artwork.

Paintings were displayed for sale on social media, at the 'Cunnamulla Fella Festival' and the Paroo Shire Council Visitor Information Centre. Ten paintings were sold, with all the proceeds being received by the artists and participating job seekers.

RESQ Plus Chief Executive Officer Chris Hamilton says the program has been a huge success.

"We've applied for two more positions. In the meantime, we'll fund the program to ensure we continue supporting emerging Indigenous artists."

RESQ Plus would like to thank Paroo Shire Council Visitor Information Centre, local retail outlets, Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd and local Indigenous organisation Paroo Nebine Aboriginal Corporation for their support.

## Virtual job board helps overcome distance

Since May 2020, employers and job seekers across South West, Central West and Far West Queensland have taken advantage of a new electronic job board.

Outback Queensland Jobs is an initiative of RESQ Plus, providing job seekers with a quick and easy way to access employment opportunities across the state.

The platform was created following a meeting by the Longreach COVID-19 Business Advisory Group. Local businesses were ready to put on extra staff in response to the COVID-19 crisis but unable to reach people across the region.

RESQ Plus CEO Chris Hamilton says there was no centralised way to advertise jobs specific to the region.

"We seized the challenge, working with a provider to launch Outback Queensland Jobs just one month later."

This free service is now available to council and business employers and job seekers in the Central West, South West and Far West Queensland regions.

The job board features:

- fast registration using a business email or social media account
- smart forms to create and save jobs
- an employer user guide to help with setting up and responding to applications
- an overview of all job applicants and their applications.

The platform also draws information from other job portals, providing a wide range of opportunities for job seekers.

Chris says Outback Queensland Jobs is an important step to help the region recover from COVID-19 restrictions.

"The Outback Queensland Jobs board is a way to help speed up the advertising and recruitment process, so we get people back into jobs as quickly as possible."

**97+**  
jobs  
advertised

**14+**  
registered  
employers

**45+**  
registered  
job seekers



John Shelswell (left) and Ronald (Ronnie) Willett at Mungallala Sawmill.

## Workers welcome at Mungallala

A strong partnership between RESQ Plus and Queensland Cypress Supplies (Mungallala Sawmill) continues to thrive.

John Shelswell, the manager at Queensland Cypress Supplies, has employed seven staff through RESQ Plus over the past three years.

John says the partnership with RESQ Plus helps him keep a full, skilled team in operation.

"I've taken on job seekers from Cunnamulla, Charleville and Mitchell. I look out for potential."

Charleville job seeker Ronald (Ronnie) Willett has been working at Mungallala Sawmill since July 2019.

RESQ Plus Team Leader Jodie McLeod says she secured Ronnie the job by chance.

"I rang John in early July 2019 to see if he had any work going. He told me to have Ronnie start Monday."

RESQ Plus organised personal protective equipment (PPE) and travel assistance to ensure Ronnie was ready to commence employment.

Since then, Ronnie has been promoted to oversee the quality of all the timber processed at the mill. He is also being mentored by other staff to work on the saw bench.

Jodie says it's all about finding job seekers the right fit.

"I knew we'd find Ronnie something. He just needed a bloke like John to give him a go.

John says he welcomes people from all walks of life.

"I don't need to know your background. As long as you're willing to put in the work, I'll give you a go.

"Job seekers like Ronnie turn up, do their job and get on with it."

Mungallala Sawmill also supports job seekers with on-site accommodation, and until recently, a bus service to and from Mitchell.

John says he wants to help people do something with their life.

"Some job seekers are doing it tough. You just need to show them that you care about them. It's a way of giving people a chance."



Brad Jones (left) and Doug Slade at Slade's Smash Repairs.

## A new journey with help along the way

After decades of driving trucks across the country, Brad Jones was looking for a job that gave him more time at home.

With the support of RESQ Plus, he secured a casual position as a car detailer and handyman at Slade's Smash Repairs in Longreach.

Since starting the role in November 2019, Brad has built his skills in mechanical and smash repairs. From tyre and shock plug changes to masking up or blocking down a repair for the painter, Brad has become a trusted go-to in the workshop.

He's currently finishing his forklift driving ticket using funding from RESQ Plus, adding another asset to his growing resume.

Doug Slade, owner and manager of Slade's Smash Repairs, says he's pleased with how far Brad has come in his role.

"Brad demonstrates a great work ethic to other employees.

"He's here every day on time, opening up the workshop. I don't have to tell him what to do every minute of the day.

"He's happy to do a bit of everything. And he'll ask for more work when he's finished. Having someone like that on your team makes a difference."

Brad says he's grateful to RESQ Plus for the support they've given him. He stays in regular contact with his Employment Consultant, Katrina Harmsworth, who also provided work clothes and organised training to support Brad into his role.

He also acknowledges the boost that he received from Tim Sorensen, a Supervisor at RESQ Plus.

"Before I got my job, I was doing the Work for the Dole program with Tim.

"He was very good at getting everyone doing work and achieving things. It was so much better to be out there, not just sitting home.

"I built skills and experience so that when I got the job, I was better prepared for the work."

Doug values the life experience that Brad brings to his role.

"We have a good employee and employer relationship. We like each other. We treat everyone here like family."

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"I built skills and experience so that when I got the job, I was better prepared for the work."



Photo credit: The Outback Paddle Regatta Festival.

## River festivities attract ducks and dragons

Hundreds of spectators flocked to the shores of Longreach’s mighty Thomson River for the inaugural Outback Paddle Regatta.

Following years of drought in Outback Queensland, the event was an opportunity to boost tourism and build community pride.

Over the long weekend in September 2019, the river became a watersports spectacle, brimming with giant rubber ducks and paddleboards, kayaks, canoes and dragon boats.

In the lead up to the event, RESQ Plus partnered with event organisers to prepare the grounds and set up for the entertainment.

Eight job seekers from the RESQ Plus Longreach team helped seal the concrete floor for the new Outback Water Sport Club rooms and bar.

RESQ Plus Supervisor Tim Sorensen says it was an opportunity to teach job seekers a new skill.

“We also helped set up the camping area, cattle yards and corrals. The team installed the ‘Big Wedgie’ water slide and put up all the event signage.

“It was important that we planned how we’d get the work done. We needed to get in and out, and get the job done well.”

It was the first year that the Outback Paddle Regatta has run and there are now hopes it will become a regular Longreach event.

Since the regatta, the RESQ Plus team have continued to support the Outback Water Sports clubhouse with ongoing grounds maintenance.

Tim says his team also helps set up many other regional events, including the local agricultural show.

“It’s nice to be part of a community event. People can see the work that the job seekers do and the contribution they’re making.

“It’s also a valuable addition to the job seekers’ resumes.”



## Food and wine bring the outback new fame

How do you celebrate the Year of Outback Tourism? With a weekend-long celebration of the diverse flavours of regional Queensland and the world.

In 2019, the Outback Food, Wine and Music Festival was a sold-out event, with hundreds of people flying into Longreach from around the country.

Set in the idyllic gardens at the Australian Stockman’s Hall of Fame, guests indulged in a mouth-watering experience, feasting on fine cuisine and dancing away the night.

RESQ Plus Supervisor Tim Sorensen and his team of job seekers were approached to help with setting up and breaking down equipment.

He says that nine job seekers were involved in the week leading into the event.

“We helped set up the stage, tables, chairs and power, put up signage and fairy lights, and decorated the event.

“Some of the guys have a real talent for decorating.”

This is the first time RESQ Plus has been involved in the festival.

Tim says it’s been good for the job seekers to be included in high-profile community events.

“These guys showed initiative, going above and beyond. People get to see what they’re capable of.

“They worked hard and it paid off.”

Four of the job seekers were approached to work at the event as general bodies. They joined guests in watching celebrity chef Matt Sinclair from Master Chef and the Dash for Cash weiner race.

“They enjoyed the whole thing from start to finish.

“The event coordinator was lovely. We were given lunch every day that we worked, and it made the team feel valued.”

## Teamwork transforms Blackall bank into gallery

A historic building in Blackall has received a much-needed facelift thanks to hard work and collaboration.

Long-term partners Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd and RESQ Plus joined forces once again to revamp the old Commonwealth Bank of Australia building.

The building was purchased by Red Ridge with a vision to transform it into an art gallery.

Led by Supervisor Gerard Bell, the RESQ Plus Blackall team took on the challenge. Work began in April 2020 and progressed over three months.

Participants helped patch walls, build skirting boards, install new fittings, sand walls and paint the interior and exterior of the building.

Gallery tracking was installed to showcase the work of the region's thriving artist community.

Gerard said working with Red Ridge allows job seekers to gain hands-on experience.

"They build a variety of skills and get to work on projects they can call their own."

The refurbishment is one of many Red Ridge projects to receive support from RESQ Plus.

Louise Campbell, Manager at Red Ridge, says that the organisations support each other's needs.

"I always offer our projects to RESQ Plus first.

"When the RESQ team works with us, they get noticed by the community. People see how capable job seekers are.

"A lot of participants end up getting jobs because of these public activities."

Louise says the building transformation is truly amazing.

"They've turned a tired bank into an active creative space."

"It's been nice to walk the journey with them and watch the slow transformation. They can sit back and take great pride."



Left to right: Kevin Holdbrook, Rhys Tee and RESQ Plus Supervisor Gerard Bell

## Pride and potential grow at Mitchell Spa

In partnership with the Booringa Action Group, RESQ Plus has been helping maintain and improve facilities at Mitchell Great Artesian Spa.

The complex features two large pools of artesian water, a cafe and deck area and the Mitchell Visitor Information Centre.

RESQ Plus Supervisor Kel Woodall says his team visits once a week to do all sorts of work, including landscaping, gardening or scrubbing and treating the outdoor deck.

The team also built the new servery and counter. Job seekers were involved in every step of the process, from welding the metal frames to milling and laminating the timber.

"We want to give job seekers a well-rounded set of skills. Skills that are valuable in the jobs they apply for."

Kel says he looks for projects where job seekers can learn new skills and see the work progress from start to finish.

"If I go out and just tell them what to do, they'll do it. But if they design it, come up with a concept and work out how they're going to do it, then they'll value the experience more."

Kel acknowledges the strong partnership with Booringa Action Group, crediting it with opening up new work opportunities for his team.

"The action group is extremely pleased with the work we've been doing.

"Some job seekers haven't had the opportunity to work on something that they can feel proud of.

"When they apply for jobs, they can now say 'here's proof that I can do it.'"



# Red benches bring **visibility to domestic violence**

When the HOPE Program approached RESQ Plus and asked them to paint the town red, it was in support of a very important cause.

The Red Bench Project is an initiative of the Red Rose Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to ending deaths from domestic violence. Red benches are popping up all over Australia as a public reminder that domestic and family violence occurs in all our communities.

The highly visible benches are intended to keep this important issue top of mind.

The benches also encourage people to reach out and start a conversation. Each bench carries a plaque with the words 'Change the ending: Let's stop domestic violence'.

RESQ Plus Supervisor John Bursle and his team of job seekers worked on the benches in Charleville. They started by removing the designated seats, taking them apart and bringing them to the workshop.

John said some of the seats were old and tired.

"We sanded them back and painted them a glossy, bright-red colour to help them stand out.

"We didn't just want to do a splash of paint. We wanted to do a quality job that would last for years to come."

John said some of his job seekers were especially passionate about working on the red benches.

"Some participants have grown up around domestic violence, or they know someone who has."

With only a couple of weeks to complete the task, the team worked quickly. The final bench was reinstalled on the day of the official opening.

In Longreach, new benches were designed by RESQ Plus Supervisor Tim Sorensen and his team, then built with donated materials and installed onsite.

Tim said the Longreach participants enjoyed the project, but getting something out in the public eye is what meant the most.



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Each bench carries a plaque with the words 'Change the ending: Let's stop domestic violence'



Photo credit: Matthew Taylor/Tourism and Events Queensland.



## Clever feeders help bilbies return to the wild

It's not every day you're called on to create specialised equipment for an endangered species.

But when the Save the Bilby Fund needed help, job seekers in Charleville were ready to respond to the challenge.

The Save the Bilby Fund works tirelessly to breed bilbies and release them into the wild. They also need to ensure the bilbies have what they need to survive once released.

While providing supplementary food during drought conditions, they came up with a prototype of a special feeding trough. Shaped like a shallow shoe box, it has a lid to keep out rain, rodents and birds.

The crucial part of the design is a lid light enough for bilbies to lift with their delicate noses, but heavy enough to close once the bilby finishes feeding.

The prototype was a success, but manufacturing more was too expensive. That's when they approached John Bursle, a RESQ Plus Supervisor based in Charleville.

With the Save the Bilby Fund covering the cost of materials, RESQ Plus donated their labour to make 10 bilby feeders for the price of one.

John says it was a big job, where local job seekers had the opportunity to learn how to measure, cut and weld materials.

"Two participants worked for a month to fill the order. It took lots of testing and rebalancing to get the weight of the lids just right."

In total, the RESQ Plus participants made 20 custom feeders. Most are now installed throughout the fenced release site. A few remain at the breeding facility so juvenile bilbies can learn how to use them.

Kat Castles from the Save the Bilby Fund was impressed with the work.

"It's been terrific working with John and the team. They're easy to work with and they welcome feedback. They delivered a top-notch item in a great time frame."

John welcomes unique projects from organisations that need help.

"The feedback was really good," said John. "The devices worked so well they asked us to make more!"

"We have a great rapport in the community here. I'm a hands-on, get-up-and-do person. I think the participants appreciate it. They never know what the next activity will be."

# Building kids their own little world



Colourful 'talking teepees' and a play kitchen.

The projects completed by RESQ Plus job seekers often inspire pride, but they're not usually playful.

When a Charleville kindergarten needed sheltered spaces for children to play and eat, RESQ Plus Supervisor John Bursle and his team had just the solution.

They got to work building fun but functional timber pyramids for the outdoor play area. With three enclosed sides and a bench seat inside, these constructions make the perfect cubby.

John said safety was a key factor.

"We made sure there were no gaps where little fingers could get caught or spaces kids could use for climbing."

They also used white paint on the inside so it's easier for teachers to check for spiders.

They got a lot more creative with the outside of the teepees, though. Graham, a local Aboriginal man and program participant, painted a stunning mural on one of the teepees.

"I was amazed at the artwork that Graham painted," John said. "It made it more effective and special. It spoke to the people there."

The children love playing in and around their colourful teepees. But within weeks they were making use of the new play spaces in an unexpected way.

"There was a little girl who would go and hide in the teepee whenever she was sad," John explains. "The teacher would go in and sit with her, and she started to open up."

"Now, when a child is upset, the teachers suggest they go out to the teepee to talk about it. They've become little safe havens where the children can share their feelings."

During one of their visits, John and his team noticed that the outdoor play kitchen had fallen into disrepair. They offered to replace it with a new, custom-made play kitchen.

John asked the parents to donate their old appliances and got to work designing a kitchen just like one at home.

"It has a double wash-up sink, two microwaves, switches and dials—all the regular things. The kids love spending all their time out there."

"A much-loved feature is the sink, hooked up with a pipe the children can pour water into."

There were six participants involved in building the kitchen from scratch, including metalworking, fitting the timber and sealing it from the elements.



## Success starts with mindset

John Bursle knows what it takes to help people get a job in regional Queensland.

For the last eight years, the RESQ Plus Supervisor has been working with job seekers in the Charleville area, helping them develop practical, employable skills.

From maintaining facilities to building new public structures, he and his team of job seekers work on projects that contribute to local community, organisations and businesses.

A former cattle station manager, John's role now includes hands-on training, liaising with local organisations and quoting on jobs to help the community.

But one of the biggest parts of his job is building respectful relationships with his team.

John says he understands that people can have a bad day.

"They may come in with a bad attitude. Something will have happened to them. I'm not going to give them a hard time.

"I have to respect what they've gone through. See where they're at another day."

For many job seekers, RESQ Plus programs offer a real chance to gain long-term employment. John says he and the employment consultants in Charleville have helped around 20 people from his team into positions—a big number for an area in drought.

"For me, it's about helping participants realise that they're worth something.

"It's about finding the right people to help with the job. They can have the skills, but more importantly, they need to have a good mindset.

"The most rewarding part is watching someone start with no skills, build their confidence and learning, then walk out the door and get a job six months later.

"If they move on and do something with their life, that's the joy of it."

## Making a difference in her community

RESQ Plus Team Leader Jasmin Hickey has her heart set on giving back to the community.

After working at Paroo Shire Council for seven years in the Finance Department, she was determined to find a job that was more community-focused.

"I started out as an Employment Consultant and was recently appointed Team Leader for Cunnamulla."

Taking on the leadership role has had its challenges. But nothing that Jasmin hasn't been able to handle with the support of the wider team.

"The atmosphere I work in is great. The Cunnamulla, Longreach and Charleville teams—there's nothing they wouldn't do to help you out."

Based in Cunnamulla, Jasmin and her team of five employees manage the areas of Eulo, Yowah, Thargomindah, Wyandra and Cunnamulla. They currently have a caseload of 180 job seekers.

Jasmin says she tries to keep the same people working with job seekers every month, to build a relationship and rapport.

"It can help them speak more openly and honestly about their mental health or any issues at home"

"We've proven in the past, working with others, that they can talk to us in confidence and we'll help refer them to the right service."

Jasmin also spends time liaising with community stakeholders, talking to them about what job seekers can offer and the available employer incentives.

"If we get community support, then the work can really begin. We can build a partnership that helps job seekers and organisations."

While leading a team may not be the easiest job, Jasmin feels that she's growing in her role every day.

"All my team and I can do is make sure we're doing our best for the job seekers.



"There is no better feeling than seeing their eyes light up when you tell them they've been successful in getting a job."



## Embracing regional culture and challenges

Julie Leithhead loves visiting small towns and experiencing different community cultures.

As a Senior Employment Consultant for RESQ Plus, she travels to Winton, Muttaborra, Aramac, Barcaldine, Jericho, Alpha, Birdsville and Stonehenge, visiting employers and job seekers.

Julie says travelling to the small towns helps her understand the opportunities that are available, so she can match job seekers to the right role.

“When I understand what both the employer and job seeker are looking for, I can work on getting a good outcome and long-term, sustainable employment for both parties.”

Based in Longreach, Julie’s role also includes auditing, reporting, quality assurance and training new employment consultants.

“A lot of training focuses on how to help job seekers build a resume or how to engage with employers.

“But you also have to show people how to be empathetic without taking on the weight of the world. In these roles, you deal with a lot of other people’s problems. It’s important to keep an eye on your own mental health, as well as others.”

Julie herself has worked for RESQ Plus for three years now. She spent her first year working with disengaged youth, assisting them with looking for apprenticeships and job search and training opportunities.

“This company has given me the ability to grow a lot in myself and my work. I’m very proud of the work I do and the team I work with.”

“The RESQ team is very supportive. It’s a young team in the Longreach area. I’m probably the oldest, so they keep me young.

“I can go to them with any questions about how young people are thinking and the struggles young people have. They educate me as much as I educate them.”



## Breaking barriers to seize new opportunities

RESQ Plus Supervisor Tim Sorensen is a long way from home.

In 2019, he and his family left the beachside township of Port Hedland, Western Australia, in search of adventure. Travels across north-west Australia led them all the way to Longreach.

When he walked through the doors at RESQ Plus, he didn’t know he’d still be there one year later.

Tim says he went in looking for part-time work.

“I literally walked in with my one-year-old on my hip and walked out with a job as the new supervisor,” Tim said.

A mechanic and electrician by trade, Tim now manages a team of job seekers, organising community projects that will help build their skills and confidence.

He says he tries to find activities that are enjoyable, different and help build self-confidence.

“Some people haven’t had an opportunity to see what they’re capable of.”

Tim is also working with Camden Park Station, testing spraying fuels that might help control the region’s infestation of prickly acacia.

If tests are successful, the project will be turned into an Activity Generating Income (AGI). This gives job seekers an opportunity to earn an income, as well as build skills and contribute to the community.

“These activities help job seekers gain the respect of property owners.

“People tell us that it’s great to see job seekers out there. We’re showing them what we can do and how we’re making a difference.

While it may have started as an adventure, Tim’s quickly found a place to belong.

“I miss the beach. But the team at RESQ Plus are fantastic. There’s a lovely community feel.”





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RESQ is proud to partner with rural and regional organisations, councils, community groups and individuals. From the wide-open skies to the long dusty roads, we thank you for your support and commitment to making a positive change.

Unless otherwise credited, photography throughout this review has been generously supplied by the RESQ Plus team.

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