



Australian Government

# A U S T R A L I A N A P P R E N T I C E S H I P S

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## Diamonds in the rough

### Argyle Diamonds

Northern Western Australia region



At Argyle Diamonds' remote Kimberley mine, there's a strong emphasis on employing local and Indigenous people.

They currently have 13 Indigenous trainees and 34 Indigenous apprentices training to become mechanical fitters, heavy duty plant mechanics, electricians, plumbers and metalliferous miners.

Chief operating officer Kevin McLeish explains that the Indigenous employment strategy came about in 2004 when Argyle Diamonds changed from being a 'fly in fly out' operation to a more sustainable, local operation.

'What that meant was that we had to generate a program to be able to recruit and train local people. Given that 50 per cent of the population in the Kimberley region is Indigenous, we had to develop some fairly innovative initiatives,' he says.

'When we changed to localisation, we had 10 per cent local and five per cent Indigenous employees. Today we have 70 per cent local and 24 per cent Indigenous people working in our business.'

There are challenges in a remote location. For instance, Australian Apprentices can't undertake their block releases locally—they have to travel to TAFE in Perth.

'On the positive side, what we can do is initiate much closer relationships with the local schools and be developing innovative school-to-work programs,' Kevin says.

Argyle Diamonds is also working with TAFE on an innovative pilot program that will station TAFE lecturers on site, rather than sending Australian Apprentices to Perth for training.

The Argyle Diamonds work readiness team travels around the region throughout the year and holds information sessions for potential recruits. After an assessment process, the most suitable applicants then begin a 12 week work readiness program, which gives them the basic skills they'll need for work.

'It's more than operational skills—it's about giving them the life skills to adapt to a work environment, and the pastoral care and support to make sure they don't fall off the rails during the critical first 3–6 months.'

Australian Apprentices bring many benefits to Argyle Diamonds. It's part of an agreement with traditional owners to share some of the benefits of the mine with local Indigenous people, and it means a more sustainable mining model, with a more stable workforce.

'We really see ourselves as being part of the solution to what is significant social disadvantage that exists in east Kimberley,' Kevin says.

'Local people really value the opportunities they're getting with Argyle and like any workplace, we are getting the benefits of diversity.'

Because of the careful recruitment, and the pre-vocational development, Argyle Diamonds is experiencing great success.

'I'm proud to say our apprentices and trainees have an 87 per cent completion rate and 90 per cent of those who finish get jobs. What we're now seeing is apprentices we put on in 2004 and 2005 moving into trade positions and going on to further studies,' Kevin says.

'When I go to their graduation ceremonies it's one of the greatest things in my job—just to see the pride on the apprentice's face and having their family see what they can do.'

'This award is recognition that through mutual respect and a shared desire to build a better future for local Indigenous people, it is possible to make a difference and to begin to address the issue of Indigenous disadvantage.'

