



Transcript

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THE HOSTS TALK TO SKILLS360 AUSTRALIA'S TROY WILLIAMS AND HEATHER RIDOUT, AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY GROUP ABOUT THE HELP AN APPRENTICE PROGRAM IN CAIRNS.

INTERVIEWEES: TROY WILLIAMS, SKILLS360 AUSTRALIA; HEATHER RIDOUT, AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY GROUP

DAVID KOCH: Well the economy is showing signs of improvement but for job seekers, especially apprentices; it's still a really hard slog. In Cairns, in North Queensland, unemployment is at 12 and a half per cent - the highest in Australia. But there is some good news. A campaign has been launched to find jobs for 50 local apprentices in just 15 days. So will it work?

For more, we're joined by Troy Williams who helped set up the Cairns program and Australian Industry Group chief executive Heather Ridout.

Good morning to you both.

HEATHER RIDOUT: Good morning.

DAVID KOCH: Troy, good on you for doing this. How's Help An Apprentice - the program - being going so far?

TROY WILLIAMS: We started the campaign on Monday and with the support of local businesses we've been able to place seven apprentices so far. Our target's 50 and in this climate where we do have unemployment at 12 and a half per cent, that's a big ask.



But the real heroes of this campaign have been the local businesses which have had the confidence to take on an apprentice or trainee and we're hoping to work with more of them over the coming two weeks.

DAVID KOCH:

It is fantastic that you've put the focus back on these young kids.

Heather, why are we seeing new apprentices struggling to get a go at the moment, because unemployment hasn't reached really high levels as expected? Business hasn't done it as tough as everyone was predicting 12 months ago. Is it just a matter of confidence?

HEATHER RIDOUT:

Look, business is doing it pretty tough and it's doing particularly tough in parts of Queensland and around that Cairns area which is so dependent on the tourism industry, on the construction industry. It's very tough up there and that's why it's got such high unemployment.

But David, you'd have noticed that employers are doing everything they can to keep on their workers and that's why unemployment hasn't fallen that much.

And one of the attributes of that has been that apprentices have been kept on in great part, but the big problem is company's can't afford to take more on and that's where we're seeing the problem the kids just can't get a start and in Queensland we're seeing reports of upward to 40 per cent drops in apprenticeship commencements in industry.

Around Australia it's probably closer to 10 to 20 per cent. Our members tell us about a third of them aren't taking on kids this year. But not many are putting them off, but they just can't afford to take them on. It's the economy.

DAVID KOCH:

Okay. You represent the bosses. They understand they've got to take on more apprentices but can't afford it. We all know that in a year's time we'll all be winging about a lack of skilled work force because we've dropped apprentices off. What's the answer?



HEATHER RIDOUT:

Well look we're in a really interesting program in South Australia with the Australia Warfare Destroyer Project and we're actually in our group scheme we've 650 kids in the Ai Group scheme and what we're doing is training the apprentices in the early years for the Warfare Destroyer Project in our members factories in South Australia.

The Government are giving us a big wage subsidy to do that and we're having no trouble placing the kids. Those kids will start on the project in a year or so when it starts. They'll be half trained and it's a fantastic project and the two aspects of it are a group training arrangement where no one employer has to take responsibility for the whole training of the kid and a very generous wage subsidy - it's 50 per cent actually and it's going gang-busters. And those young people - they're so outstanding - they will walk onto those big ship projects which are wonderfully exciting projects for young people and they will be half way through an apprenticeship and we won't have a big skill shortage around being able to deliver those big defence projects.

So that's the kind of an answer - that's a proposal we have put to Julia Gillard, to the Government, some months ago. I know it's under active consideration and we think that push the button on it; give us a couple of years and we will not have this pipeline problem of the apprenticeship commencements falling.

DAVID KOCH:

All right. Julia get your act together. There's the message - extend that scheme across the rest of the country.

Troy do you think your program will help kids in Cairns in the long term?

TROY WILLIAMS:

Look we hope so. What we're asking businesses to think about - what their skill needs will be in three or four years times because they need to make that investment today. The industry up here is doing it tough. By any measure we do have a recession with 12 and a half per cent unemployment and it's pretty disappointing when you see the kids - whether they're at Woree High School, where a lot of



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these kids have come from, whether they're at tropical North Taithe - without a job they're not a happy bunch.

And when you see them in our office in the last few days when they've been told they've been given a job it makes coming to work worthwhile. I mean you talk to the employers who've given them a job, you know, they're pretty confident that in three or four years times when these kids finish the apprenticeship, they'll have the skills they need to make their business a success.

DAVID KOCH:

And great for their self confidence. It has all sorts of social implications. It's fantastic and thank you both for coming on the program.

Heather, we'll give Julia Gillard's office a call and see what she's doing about it and see if we can give her a hurry up as well. It sounds like a terrific solution.

HEATHER RIDOUT:

Yeah, go for it David, go for it.

DAVID KOCH:

Troy congratulations again. Great job.

TROY WILLIAMS:

Thank you.

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