

A PORTAL OF LADY TRADIES IN AUSTRALIA

Omesh Jethwani, Government Projects & Programs Manager in-conversation with Wendy Pinch, founder of The Lady Tradies Australia.

1. Everyone has a story to share or an autobiography to write. How does your chapter begin?

I come from a family of tradies. From a very young age, I was always the one in the shed with my father, i.e. servicing cars, chopping wood, helping him make or fix whatever he could.

I left school at age 16 to get a full-time job in retail. A few years later, I moved onto finance and worked my way up through St George Bank. After 11 years (eight of those in a Branch Management Role) I left and have had a variety of other careers including working at Port Waratah coal services, a construction and maintenance company, aged care, as a ski tour guide and a few more.

About 3.5 years ago (while overseeing The Lady Tradies Australia), I started volunteering for homelessness and domestic violence service based in Newcastle. The organisation I volunteered for acquired an extremely run-down property to convert it into a refuge for women and children.

It was in a dreadful condition and was a massive project with a minimal budget. We worked on renovating the property after-hours and weekends for over 18 months. With the help of local community organisations and other volunteers, it is now a beautiful 30-bed refuge that is sadly fully occupied every night.

While volunteering, the organisation offered me a part-time role to help them with their marketing, communications and Government grants.

2. It is rumoured that The Lady Tradies Australia's inception was born out of frustration with work done by



undependable tradespeople. Is this true?

Well, yes — that is just one of the reasons.

While renovating my first home, I was always being let down, over-quoted or spoken down to by many of the tradies I was trying to use. There were tradies that just never returned my calls or showed up. I kept thinking it should not be like this, and I bet a woman would not do this. So, I started researching and sourcing for female tradies I could use.

Unfortunately, that search was frustrating as they were very hard to find. By the time I did, my renovations had completed.

I also had an elderly aunt who lived alone and needed a plumber but felt too vulnerable to let them into her home by herself. When I asked her if she would allow a female plumber in, she said yes, as she would feel more comfortable with them.

Around this time, I was also working in the construction and maintenance sector. We did

shutdowns in the mines and energy sector and had a female boilermaker and a few trade assistants.

Whenever the organisation sent a crew away, it would consist of a hundred men and only 2-3 women, and I realised what a tough gig that would be for them. The name Lady Tradies had been in my head for years, and in 2011, I finally put it all together and kicked it off.

3. Can you please share with our readers the services Lady Tradies Australia provides?

The Lady Tradies Australia provides a Facebook page and a website portal to 'promote, support, connect and encourage women and girls in non-traditional roles and trades.'

The website has a lot of information, but the two main functions are connecting the public and business sector with Lady Tradies and recruitment.

Under the 'Find a Lady Tradie' section, we list fully qualified women running their trade

businesses, those working for employers and handywomen in almost every state around the country. The 'Find a Lady Tradie' section provides the community with an alternative to source the 'traditional male tradesperson' while promoting and creating more work for the Lady Tradies or the businesses employing them.

Under 'Work Info', the website provides information on how to jumpstart a career in the building and construction industry, pathways to apprenticeships, employment and training.

A more significant part of this website section is dedicated to 'Positions Vacant', whereby local and national companies advertise current positions in their organisations.

These organisations are mainly looking to balance their diverse gender workforce by employing more females in non-traditional roles and trades.

In other sections of the website, there is information on products and services to help Lady Tradies, handy links to organisations, event information and inspirational stories of women in trades.

Another part of our website is the 'Looking for Work' section where job seekers can post their resumes. It's a place for women to stand out in the selection process and connect with potential employers.

Our Facebook page promotes awareness and engages with our audience. It provides a great deal of interaction between existing Lady Tradies on any number of issues or advice, including a network of support and encouragement to all that use it.

4. Which companies have The Lady Tradies Australia worked with?

Numerous! – but in no particular order; Woolworths, Downer, Thales, The Royal Australian Navy, CSPB, John Deer Chesterfield, Aurizon, Icon Water, Wesfarmers, EvoEnergy, Foxtel, Jims Mowing, ActewAGL, The Antarctica Project, Glenco, Cummins, V/Line, Shape Australia and lots more.

These are all forward-thinking organisations that recognise and value gender equality in the workplace.

5. In the last 12 months, what were some of the jobs advertised through The Lady Tradies Australia portal?

This last 12 months we have had more variety than any previous year, and it is exciting that it continues to grow.



We have advertised for roles such as general maintenance technicians, apprentices or qualified electricians, carpenters, plumbers, refrigeration mechanics, mechanical or electrical fitters, traineeships in telecommunications and data voice, trade assistants and even the 150 positions for the upcoming The Antarctica Project.

In addition, we had an Account Management role for women with the experience that may want to get off the tools.

6. Do you think there has been an improvement of women intake in the building & construction industry?

You can tell by the companies we are working with and the roles they are advertising – the majority have been in the building and construction industry.

The statistics may only show a slight increase, but we have to remember just how big the industry is. The numbers of men to women is so drastically different – the percentage rise will be small.

We may never see a 50/50 balance, and that's ok – there may not be that many women who want to be tradies. However, it is the year 2020. It needs to be the norm and acceptable for a

woman to apply for a trade role as it is for a man - if she wants to.

7. What do you think are the factors that motivate people to hire female tradie workers?

More and more organisations are seeking to diversify and balance their workplace. Forward-thinking organisations are recognising the value in that. They see how a female tradie brings a different perspective to a worksite, they communicate differently, but they are just as driven to learn and advance their knowledge and skills.

We need more organisations to jump on board and give women a go, especially female apprentices. Stop looking for reasons not to and start looking at the benefits it really can bring.

8. What is one piece of advice you would give to the next generation of female students considering a trade in the building and construction industry?

There's more than one! Think about the various trade career opportunities that are available and research on 'what' it is you want to do. Do not just pick a plumbing trade because your father is a plumber.

Many apprenticeships fail in the early years (both males and females) – because school leavers end up choosing the wrong trade. Look at each business you have in mind, - what is it that attracts you to it and be honest with yourself, can you do this job. For example, if you are afraid of heights, roofing may not be the right trade for you.

There is more information on this and a self-help guide on my website under Work Info > Where to Start. I would encourage women and female school leavers to check that out.

Get as pre-skilled as you can. Enrol in a Certificate 2 or a pre-apprenticeship course, get your White Card, First Aid and any work experience you can.

Get your resume in order and highlight any training and skills you have that you can use in your future job. It is a significant expense and commitment for employers to take on an apprentice. They need to see you are equally committed to the next 3-4 years with them and your new role as they are to you.

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