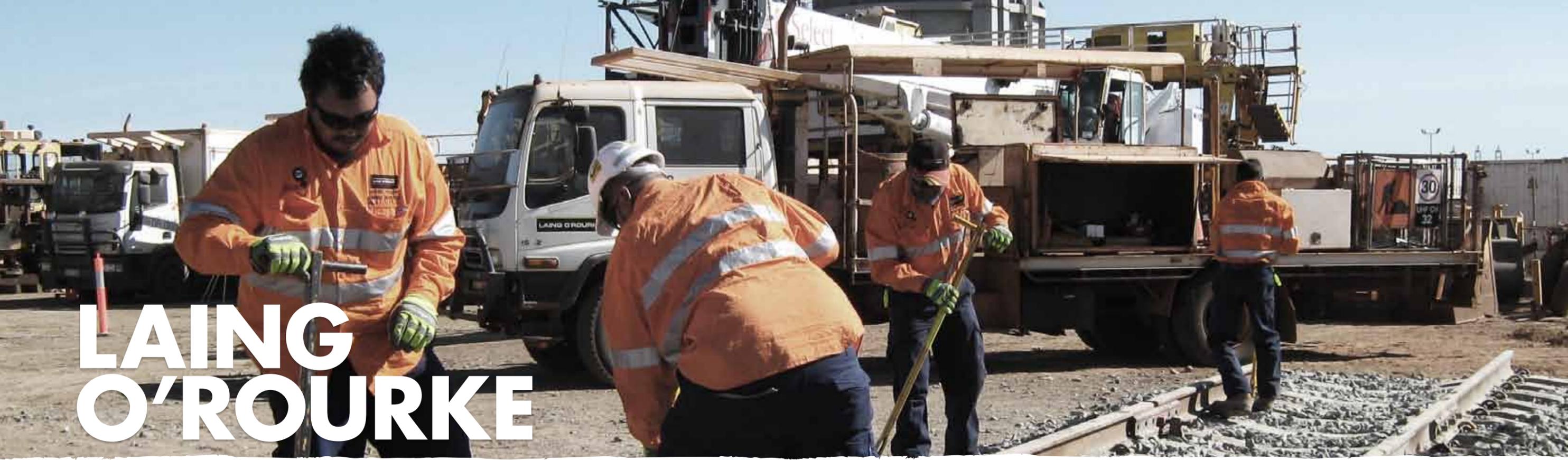


LAINING O'ROURKE

Real-life accounts of how the National Workforce Development Fund is benefiting Australian transport and logistics enterprises.



LAING O'ROURKE

West Australian construction and engineering company Laing O'Rourke can build many things: ports, wharves, roads, bridges and lately, better communities.

Laing O'Rourke operates in four Australian states. In WA, the majority of its work is in the Pilbara, making and maintaining railway tracks for BHP and FMG.

The company wanted to minimise fly-in, fly-out operations in the Port Hedland community and instead offer employment opportunities to local residents.

"Our thinking was to give back to the community where we've been working for years," says Laing O'Rourke indigenous relations manager, Andrea White.

"Let's make it sustainable, let's up-skill the Pilbara people for work, especially indigenous people who don't have the skills and are crying out for work."

Laing O'Rourke training and development manager Tony Sawiris went online to research funding and found the Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council.

And on the TLISC website, he found the National Workforce Development Fund, which supports training for qualifications and skill sets in priority areas of need.

"I already had a plan around skilling an Indigenous workforce in the north west, so that supported my application," Sawiris says. "TLISC was fantastic, because we came up with a (funding) model that suited the business."

Laing O'Rourke was approved for funding to deliver Certificates II, III and IV in Transport and Logistics (Rail Infrastructure), focusing on the first for the Pilbara.

"Up there we do a lot of rail work, laying the track, maintaining the track," White says. "So (the Certificate II) was about getting these young Port Hedland fellas skilled to be productive on the track, but more importantly, skilled to be safe in the working environment, to deal with conflict, to communicate appropriately, all those sorts of things, because they have been out of work a long time."

The certificate was incorporated into Making Tracks, a 10-week program of coaching and tuition to prepare trainees for rail work, and work more broadly.

Laing O'Rourke first consulted then wrote a memorandum of understanding with Aboriginal-owned Bloodwood Tree Association, who specialise in transitioning the Pilbara's Indigenous people from unemployment to employment, White says.

The first four weeks were about life skills: dealing with conflict, communication, safety in the workplace, how to obtain a birth certificate and licence, White says. "We also did literacy and numeracy tests: like, reading signs and listening to the two-way radio, but also being able to read your pay slips and that sort of thing."

The final six weeks focused on the Certificate II units of competency and were conducted by a trainer from Registered Training Organisation, the Centre for Excellence in Rail Training (CERT), with classroom theory and practical work.

Making Tracks also helped trainees to become drug and alcohol free, White says.

The WA State Government reports alcohol consumption in Port Hedland is twice the Australian average and that the Pilbara has the youngest uptake of substance use, with correlating statistics of alcohol and drug-fuelled violence. It suggests this is due to the area's high unemployment rate, which is more than 40 per cent.

Laing O'Rourke opted for a transitional program over 10 weeks, rather than a zero tolerance approach, acknowledging its hard yakka to turn a life around.

After 10 weeks, "as long as they completed the Certificate II, had a very high attendance and could provide us with a clear drug and alcohol (urine) screen, they were guaranteed a job," White says.

Of the first intake's 10 trainees, seven are now full time permanent employees. Two had left in the first week for other jobs; one is still working on getting clean.

"A few of them said it's just been life-changing," White says, not least because the program also reached out

GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY WHERE WE'VE BEEN WORKING FOR YEARS

to each trainee's family. "It's not just about getting the boys to come on to the course; it's also about getting their families to support them.

"When you've got that relationship, it's less likely they'll leave." So was it a risk to invest in training qualified tradespeople in an industry with a skills shortage?

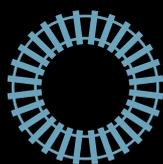
Sawiris says he's heard the argument raised many times: "If you up-skill them, they'll leave". But we also recruit people that come trained. People in the rail industry are fairly itinerant. That's just part and parcel of the business. But we value our human capital, and try to ensure we continue to develop them."

Apart from the apparent community benefits, White says the program has been hugely beneficial to Laing O'Rourke and its clients. "We got (client) supervisors involved from the beginning, saying 'You're going to get great, qualified, local guys, and it's not going to cost you as much as it would without the (NWDF).'"

Sawiris says few trainees had completed any education beyond year 10, "so it's a great achievement for them to come out with a Certificate II. They're chuffed.

"And it is a great selling point for the company for future tenders and potential clients. We're not only a skilled workforce; we're a qualified, skilled workforce."

Laing O'Rourke is in the business of providing local, national and international rail services. They are recognised globally for their ability to self-perform innovative, cost-effective rail solutions in track and civil infrastructure / rail systems / asset management and maintenance.



30 years young

For the past 30 years, Laing O'Rourke has delivered rail infrastructure in rural, remote and urban locations, locally, nationally and internationally.

Local people

Where possible, Laing O'Rourke hires and trains local and indigenous rail workers to ensure the expertise and knowledge remains within the region and creates long-lasting benefits for the local rail industry.



NWDF value

Total value of NWDF program to date:
\$1.253 million.

Where they are

Laing O'Rourke employs more than 5,300 workers in New South Wales, Central Queensland, Perth and the Pilbara.

For more information about how TLISC can assist your enterprise in accessing the National Workforce Development Fund, please contact our Workforce Development team:

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Telephone 03 9604 7200

tlisc.org.au