

Be Recognised

New England Region



Digital Program

13 June 2025

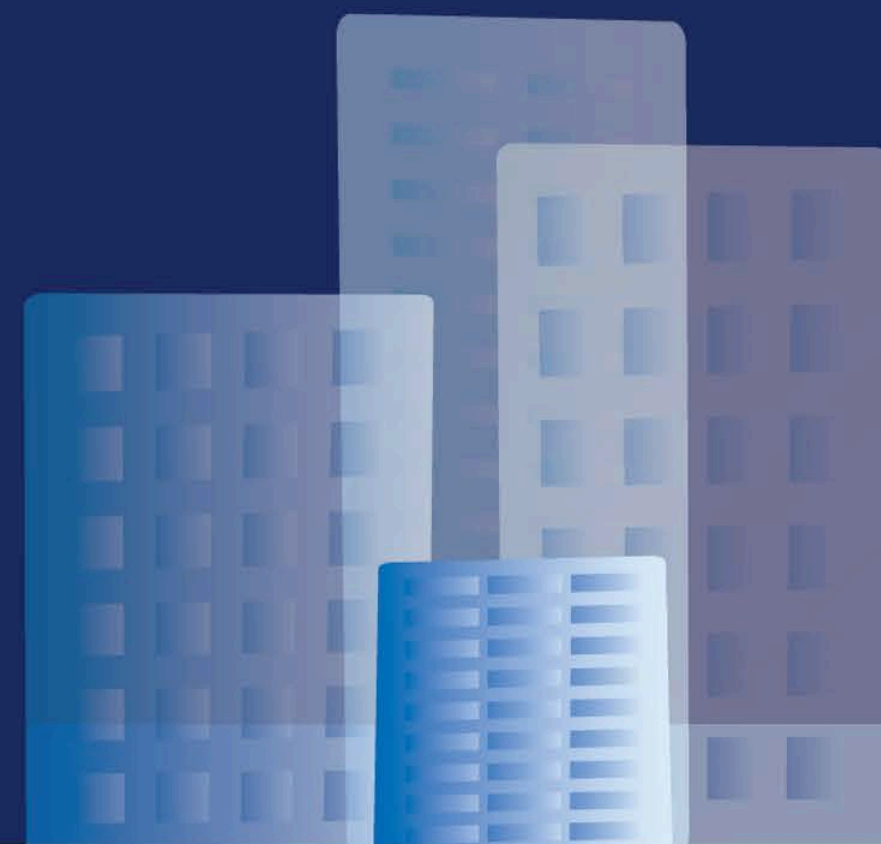


Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Gomeroi people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this event is being held. We would like to pay our respect to the Elders both past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People present this evening.



Thank you to our 2025 State Partners



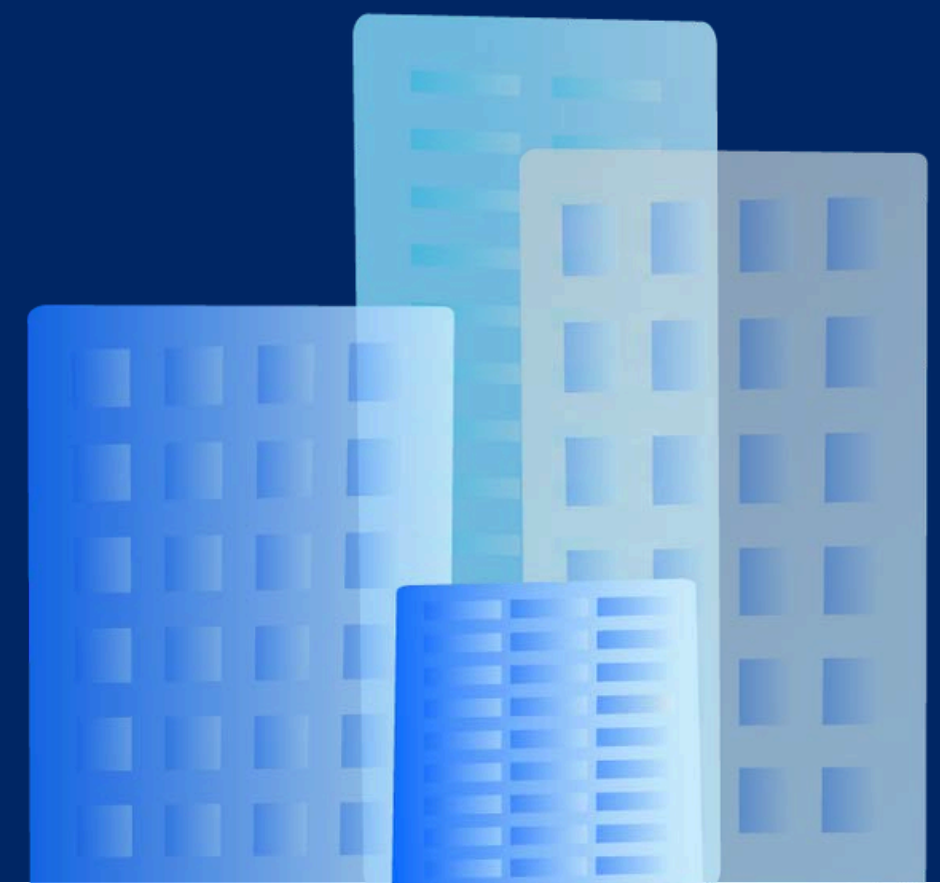
Diamond Partner



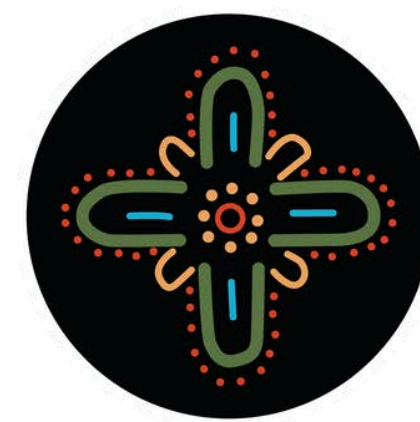
Gold Partners



Thank you to our 2025 Regional Partners



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Silver Partners



Bronze Partners



Order of Proceedings



Acknowledgement of Country

Marc Sutherland

Master of Ceremonies Introduction

Jayden Townsend

Simone Williams

Welcome Address

Guest Speech

Gabby Ward

Award Categories

- Sue Haylock Memorial - Excellence in VET Award
- Vocational Student of the Year
- VET Trainer/Teacher of the Year
- VET in Schools Student of the Year
- School-based Apprentice/Trainee of the Year
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year
- Trainee of the Year
- Apprentice of the Year

Closing Speech

Bede Maher



Message from the Region



Good evening ladies and gentlemen and our 2025 New England regional finalists.

Firstly, I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on this evening, the Gomeroi people, and I pay my respect to the Elders, both past and present, who have maintained the knowledge of culture and paved the way for our youth to be the leaders of tomorrow.

It's a pleasure to be with you tonight in Tamworth to recognise talented individuals and celebrate your achievements in vocational education and training in our region.

With over 3,315 apprentices and trainees in the New England and North West region along with 1,218 employers, more than 95,000 across NSW — our finalists represent the best in skill, commitment, and potential.

Your VET journey is possible thanks to the support of TAFE NSW, private training providers, schools, employers, and community partners who have backed you every step of the way.

To our finalists' congratulations on your outstanding accomplishments, your drive, passion, and commitment deserve accolades and inspire all of us. Whether or not you take home an award tonight, you've already made an incredible impact.

To all the nominators, your belief in the talents and contributions of our finalists has been instrumental in bringing them to the spotlight. Thank you for your encouragement and for recognizing excellence within our community.

To all of you gathered here tonight - have a wonderful evening!.

Meet Our Masters of Ceremonies

Helping us celebrate tonight are our fantastic Masters of Ceremonies — passionate ambassadors for Vocational Education and Training. Having each undertaken their own VET journey, they embody the transformative power of vocational education and are proud representatives of its impact.



Jayden Townsend

While many people dream of changing careers, the leap is often relegated to the ‘too hard’ basket. Qualified plumber Jayden Townsend couldn’t shake the desire to do more for others and totally changed his life with a Certificate IV in Community Services. After wrapping up his studies in Plumbing and feeling content in his role, Jayden presumed that his educational journey had come to an end. But his drive to continue learning could not be suppressed.

Commencing a traineeship with Tamworth Family Support Services (TFSS), Jayden felt immediately welcomed by his colleagues. “I was provided with seemingly endless opportunities to gain new skills, get a start within the industry and also work towards gaining an industry-recognised qualification,” he says. His experience has been so transformative that he’s furthering his studies with a Diploma of Community Services and is considering a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology or Social Work. “Completing this traineeship has completely changed the direction of my life.”

Simone Williams

Simone started her career in the Nursing sector and transitioned into vocational teaching in 2010 with TAFE NSW. Her passion is to shape the next generation of our healthcare professionals. She displays unwavering commitment to VET and has a passion for empowering individuals through skills-based learning, evidenced by her continuous effort to promote the importance of vocational pathways.



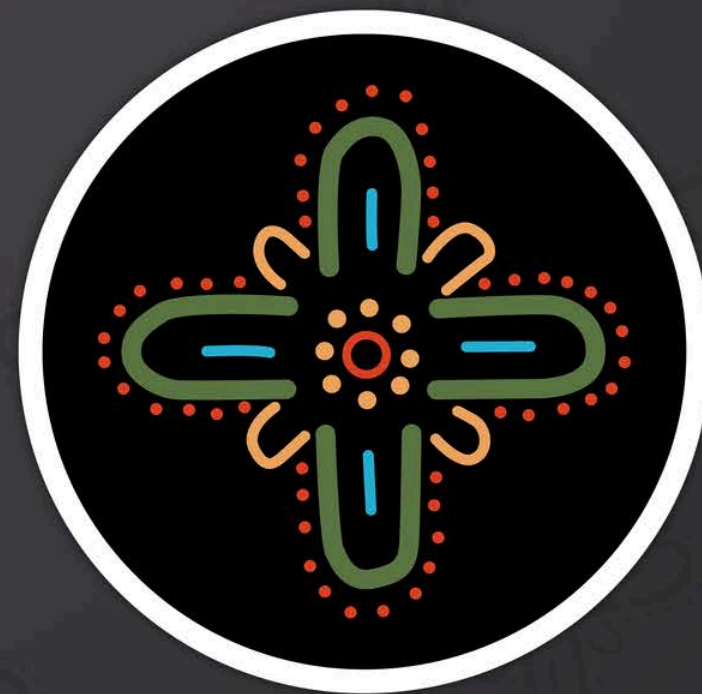
Simone is committed to fostering diverse learning environments that require an inclusive understanding of adult learning principles and a proactive approach to engagement. Her strong communication, leadership and genuine passion for her work, distinguishes her as an influential figure in the field. Simone demonstrates a genuine passion for the VET sector, connects with diverse audiences, and is dedicated to actively support learners to make a meaningful impact. Simone states witnessing the achievements of her students at the end of their educational journey is immensely gratifying.



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Australian Training Plus is an approved Registered Training Organisation delivering both accredited and non-accredited training across New South Wales. Our training opportunities range from short courses and single student learning to classroom-based long courses from Certificate II to Diploma in a range of in-demand industries.

Additionally, we can individualise training packages to meet employers' needs, be it to skill incoming staff or provide professional development options to current employees. We also facilitate traineeship and apprenticeship pathways that connect employers looking for staff with students looking to learn through hands-on experience, while recognising any prior learning.

We are approved to deliver Smart and Skilled funded training in the following regions: Far West Orana, New England North West, Hunter, Newcastle & Lake Macquarie, and Central West. We are not limited to these areas - we can deliver training across all of NSW!

Regional Partners

Careers Network Inc are proud sponsors of the Training Awards, supporting young people to the introduction of Vocational Education and Training and Employment through quality industry placements.

Our aim is to work collaboratively with stakeholder groups to strengthen partnerships between industry and education, to increase knowledge and opportunities for careers and further education for youth.

Careers Network Inc have enjoyed supporting young people to achieve their successes over the last 23 years.



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EMPOWERING THE FUTURE



Vocational Student of the Year Finalist

Kristy Hicks

Qualification

Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care

Trained by:

Sureway Skills Training Pty Ltd

Employed by

Tooraweenah Preschool



Kristy Hicks needed a flexible career that would allow her to care for her two young sons and early childhood education seemed like it might be the right fit. While she needed to navigate challenges that included multiple relocations and unsuccessful applications, Kristy doubled down and committed to completing her training so she could become an early childhood educator.

Through the support of her trainer and her determination, she secured a casual position at Tooraweenah Preschool in early 2023. In completing her training, Kristy not only found that she had industry-ready skills but also that she had built the emotional resilience and relevant skills to help her in her day-to-day life as a mother. As a cherry on top of her impressive accomplishment, Kristy was offered a permanent part-time role with Tooraweenah Preschool as an in-training educator and she's not looking back.

Vocational Student of the Year Finalist



Eseta Vusamu



Qualification

Certificate III in Individual Support

Trained by

TAFE NSW

Employed by

Moree Care

Esther Vusamu is deeply committed to aged care and advocacy for the elderly, particularly those living with dementia. As a Fijian Australian, her journey began with a mission to improve the lives of ageing communities. Moved by the struggles she witnessed, Esther took a crucial step in her career journey – enrolling in a qualification in Individual Support. VET marked a turning point for Esther, providing her with the practical skills, industry knowledge and personal confidence needed to make a difference in the lives of many.

Through her qualification, her belief in the importance of empathy, patience, and person-centred care was affirmed and she continuously creates meaningful connections with residents she cares for. Her work with organisations like Meals on Wheels and her advocacy for dementia care exemplify her dedication to delivering the highest quality care and working towards improving aged care practices across the board.



VET Trainer/Teacher of the Year Finalist

Mitch Green

Field of Study

Training and Compliance

Employed by

LessPlex Training Pty Ltd



Mitch Green is a standout Trainer, Assessor, Facilitator, and Compliance and Safety Specialist at LessPlex Training. With trade qualifications as a Boilermaker, Rigger, and Crane Operator, he brings more than 100 units of competency to the table, alongside certifications in Engineering, and an Advanced Diploma in WHS. Mitch's extensive industry experience spanning hospitality, federal government, construction, and manufacturing allows him to provide learners with unique views into the construction industry.

As the owner and Director of LessPlex Training, Mitch prides himself on ensuring that all training meets industry needs and regulatory standards. A champion supporter of workforce development in the New England and North West NSW regions, Mitch is continuing his own education journey with an Advanced Diploma in Leadership and Management. His approach to educating is making a difference in both the lives and industries across the region.

VET Trainer/Teacher of the Year Finalist



Patricia Fulloon



Field of Study

Business - Leadership and Management

Employed by

BSI Learning

Patricia Fulloon has over 23 years of experience in using education to empower people across diverse environments, from inside resorts to rural communities, and currently in correctional facilities. As a trainer for BSI Learning, Patricia specialises in business courses and has found her greatest fulfilment in teaching inmates within Corrective Services NSW.

Patricia believes that mutual learning occurs in these spaces, and she prides herself on being able to support students facing significant barriers including trauma and mental health struggles. Despite the challenges of a restricted environment, Patricia's innovative teaching methods have led to profound transformations and helped learners gain skills for reintegration into society. With a slew of recognition for her achievements already under her belt, including creating a successful learning department at Daydream Island Resort, Patricia is committed to inspiring learners to build ethical futures, regardless of their past.



VET in Schools Student of the Year Finalist

Jack Benjamin

Qualification

Certificate III in Financial Services

Trained by

Diocese of Lismore Catholic Schools Limited

School

McCarthy Catholic College



Jack Benjamin has truly excelled in his qualification in financial services; inspired by his mother's work in the finance industry, and hearing about vocational education and training after a visit from former NRL payer Chris Lawrence, Jack knew that a VET pathway was the choice for him. He wanted the chance to explore hands-on learning in the finance industry and seized the opportunity to take on a qualification while still completing high school. Through his studies, Jack has gained a comprehensive understanding of financial processes and developed essential industry connections.

A leader amongst his peers, elected school captain, Jack has honed his leadership, teamwork, and communication skills, and positioned himself well for a successful career in finance. His drive and confidence have seen him build networks and kick start his career ahead of the curve.

VET in Schools Student of the Year Finalist



Ellie Jones



Qualification

Certificate III in Health Services Assistance

Trained by

TAFE NSW

School

Carinya Christian School

Ellie Jones considers her qualification in health services assistance as the first step toward her lifelong dream of becoming a nurse. Having spent time in hospitals as a young person, this career path is deeply personal for Ellie and her lived experiences underpin her desire to provide compassionate care for others. During her two-week hospital placement Ellie was able to get hands-on experience in assisting patients and seeing how skilled professionals operate in the workplace, which further fuelled her passion for nursing.

In choosing VET for its practical skills and industry exposure, Ellie was able to balance her studies while experiencing real work environments. She is committed to supporting others, as evidenced by her community volunteering in Fiji. Her dedication to making a positive impact in the healthcare industry is clear, and Ellie has set herself up for a wonderful future.



VET in Schools Student of the Year Finalist

Bateson Pittman

Qualification

Certificate II in Agriculture

Trained by

NSW Department of Education

School

Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School



Bateson Pittman is an enthusiastic student who chose to complete his qualification while completing his senior years. With a strong interest in agriculture already present, Bateson's studies have now equipped him with the working knowledge for future success in the industry. Bateson thrives in the dynamic agricultural industry and has been able to develop the know-how needed for a range of farm work; he has thrived with the hands-on learning opportunities afforded to him during his studies. Bateson has built his confidence in agricultural practices, workplace safety, and risk management and is reaping the rewards.

He values teamwork and communication as crucial cornerstones within the industry and he actively shares insights about the benefits of VET when speaking to peers and colleagues. With a solid foundation in agriculture, Bateson is excited to contribute meaningfully for many years to come.

School-based Apprentice/ Trainee of the Year Finalist



Emilie Hill



Qualification

Certificate III in Health Services Assistance

Trained by

TAFE NSW

Employed by

Hunter New England Health District

School

Oxley High School

Emilie Hill undertook a school-based traineeship with Hunter New England Local Health District knowing that this decision would serve as a key stepping stone to her goal of becoming an Assistant in Nursing (AIN). She has taken every opportunity to build a foundation for her future. After experiencing the health care systems overseas, particularly hospital care in Nepal, Emilie knew that this was the profession for her.

Emilie's studies have allowed her to extend her understanding of patient care and to see firsthand the responsibilities of nursing professionals. The skills that Emilie has built are contributing to her future successes. As an advocate for vocational education and training and health services industry, Emilie actively engages with Year 10 students to share insights about the experience and to help others consider joining the world of healthcare. Emilie is excited to continue making a meaningful impact in the industry.



School-based Apprentice/ Trainee of the Year Finalist

Thea Sheridan

Qualification

Certificate III in Health Services Assistance

Trained by

TAFE NSW

Employed by

Hunter New England Health District

School

Calrossy Anglican School



Thea Sheridan knew she wanted to work in healthcare from an early age, thanks to shows like Paramedics Australia and Operation Ouch, and her conviction deepened when she witnessed the vital role nursing staff played in the lives of her family members. Committed to giving back to her community, Thea embarked on a school-based traineeship in Health Services Assistance, solidifying aspirations she's held since Year 9. Balancing her studies with 500 hours of hands-on experience at Tamworth Rural Referral Hospital is a testament to her dedication to her craft and her commitment to the work.

Alongside her qualification, Thea's volunteer work with the Tamworth Netball Association has honed her leadership skills which continue to serve her well in all she does. Thanks to the support from her teachers and colleagues Thea is thriving and determined to make a positive impact in the healthcare system while improving health outcomes for others.

School-based Apprentice/ Trainee of the Year Finalist



Lilly Walker



Qualification

Certificate III in Health Services Assistance

Trained by

TAFE NSW

Employed by

Hunter New England Health District

School

McCarthy Catholic College

Lilly Walker chose to do a school-based traineeship in nursing while working at the Manilla Multipurpose Service so she could gain invaluable clinical experience under the guidance of seasoned nurses and healthcare professionals. Her studies have allowed her to develop key skills, like how to balance her educational and work commitments; preparing her well for a future in nursing.

Lilly has always wanted to make a positive impact on people's lives through compassionate care and her pathway is supporting her to live that dream. Her hands-on experiences have allowed her to put her learning into practice and she has stepped up to take on leadership roles, including leading patient personal care discussions. Lilly is excited about the knowledge she is gaining and knows that she is on the way to making a meaningful difference in the nursing industry.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year Finalist

Shayla Hall

Qualification

Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care

Trained by

Australian Training Plus

Employed by

Birrelee MACS



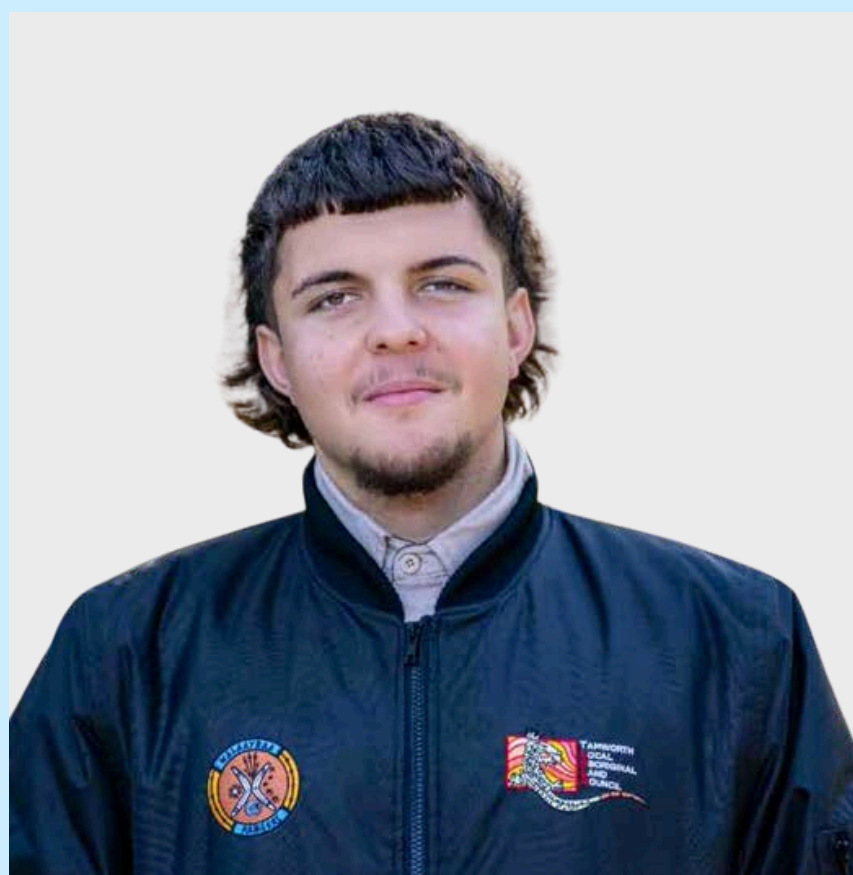
Shayla is an accomplished early childhood educator driven by love for helping children to learn and grow. She strives to be a role model that young learners can look up to. Shayla was determined to obtain her qualification, and her placement allowed her to bring her son to class, meaning she could complete her hours at a centre that welcomed him as well. This flexibility was crucial to her success and led to her current position at Birrelee. Shayla's journey nurtured her ability to support children in learning environments and has further improved her communication and teamwork skills.

Shayla has emerged as a leader amongst her peers and, with this move into early childhood education and care, she is committed to encouraging others to pursue their own educational goals through vocational education and training.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year Finalist



Chayse Shepherd



Qualification

Certificate II in Conservation and Ecosystem Management

Trained by

Kiama Community College

Employed by

Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council

School

Peel High School

Chayse Shepherd has been able to explore the world of conservation and ecosystem management through a school-based traineeship with the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council, where he serves as a Walaaybaa Ranger. Driven by a passion for conservation of culture and country, Chayse is deepening his knowledge and building his confidence in educating the wider community about the significance of traditional practices.

Chayse was elected 2025 school captain and is a role model to his peers. As a graduate of the Gomeroi Cultural Academy and a senior leader in the Peel High School Aboriginal Dance group, he skilfully balances his responsibilities and studies while taking on opportunities to mentor younger students. His school-based traineeship has solidified his plans to go to university and continue his pathway to care for country and share culture.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year Finalist

Tijari-Ann Tighe

Qualification

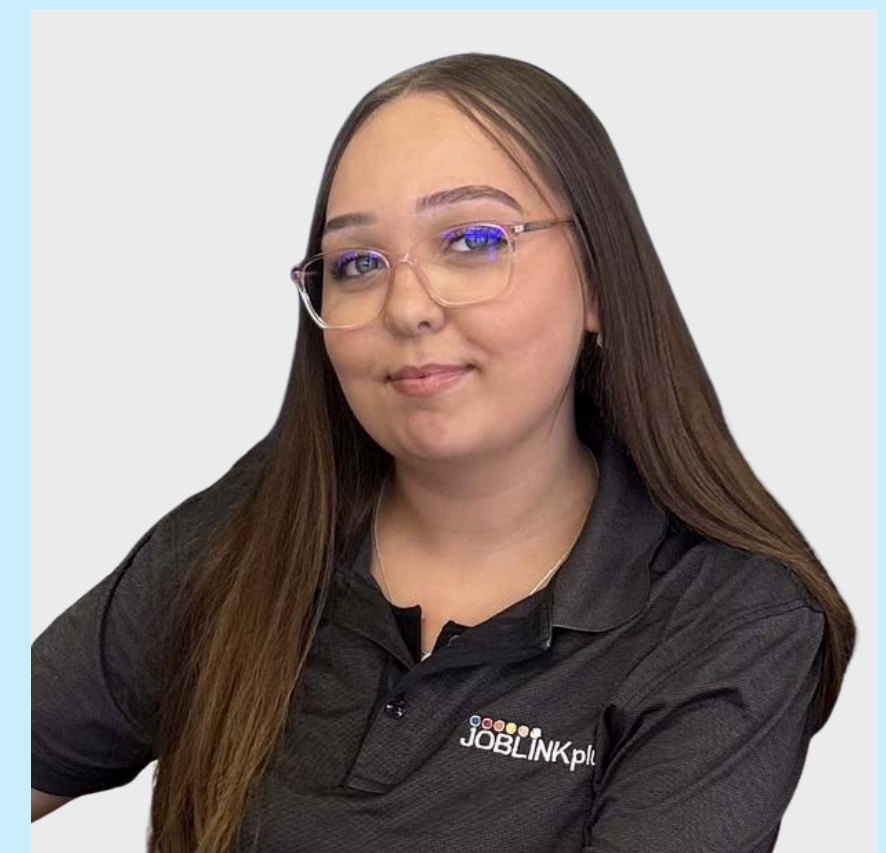
Certificate III in Business

Trained by

Australian Training Plus

Employed by

Joblink Plus



Tijari-Ann Tighe is a business professional who has always wanted to work in the support services industry. She has seen the challenges faced by remote communities firsthand and knows the impact that access to education and opportunities can have on an individual. Understanding that one voice can make a difference in a young person's life, Tijari-Ann's training has helped to develop the key skills to support young people to thrive. Community-minded through and through, she creates strong relationships with colleagues and clients alike.

During her traineeship Tijari-Ann's exposure to the real estate industry gave her the motivation to pursue an additional qualification to round-out her skillset. She is dedicated to empowering others and advocating for her community; using her experiences to create positive change and support communities to thrive.

Trainee of the Year Finalist



Chelsea Bilsborough



Qualification

Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care

Trained by

International Child Care College

Employed by

Gwydir Shire Council

Chelsea Bilsborough has always wanted to work with children, and she chose a traineeship as a way to make a real impact on young lives and families. Completing her traineeship at the Local Bingara Preschool, Chelsea received invaluable support from her teachers, mentors and colleagues. Now, as a fully qualified educator, Chelsea works alongside her room leader four days a week and has taken on the responsibility of guiding other educators and trainees in her workplace.

Chelsea's journey required her to find new ways of balancing school, work, and study; she gained a boost in her time management skills which allowed her to thrive in her workplace. Buoyed by the encouragement from her mentors and workplace, Chelsea is set to excel as an early childhood educator and enhance the lives of young learners for a long time to come.



Trainee of the Year Finalist

Evelyn Bower

Qualification

Certificate IV in Human Resource Management

Trained by

TAFE NSW

Employed by

Tamworth Regional Council



Evelyn Bower believes in the power of human connections and knows how important strong stakeholder relationships are, which led her to a traineeship with Tamworth Regional Council. Initially inspired by her father's experiences in HR, Evelyn chose this qualification to gain valuable skills and knowledge that would advance her career, and throughout her traineeship she has gained extensive experience in recruitment and staff learning and development.

Evelyn has found a particular niche in ensuring candidates have exceptional experiences during the recruitment process. As the youngest team member in her department, and serving as the People and Culture Assistant, Evelyn brings a fresh perspective into the workplace. Her experience has allowed her to showcase Tamworth Regional Council as an outstanding place to work, and through her role Evelyn contributes positively to both the organisation and the community.

Trainee of the Year Finalist



David Rippin



Qualification

Diploma of Community Services

Trained by

Australian Training Plus

Employed by

Sora Community Services

David Rippin began working as a Trainee Case Worker at Sora after five years of working on a chicken farm; it was a big change of pace when he moved into the world of community services. He's always been committed to helping others and his qualification has allowed David to make a positive impact in his community day-to-day.

Growing up, David faced several challenges when relocating to Australia at just 13 years old and through his journey into community services he found he was not only able to help others, but he could also heal his own past experiences. Compassionate through-and-through, David's disposition is evident in the approach to working with individuals and families. He is proud to be part of a team that provides essential support during challenging times and is excited to continue growing within the community services sector.



Apprentice of the Year Finalist

Travis Chaffey

Qualification:

Certificate III in Heavy Commercial Vehicle
Mechanical Technology

Trained by

TAFE NSW

Employed by

Double R



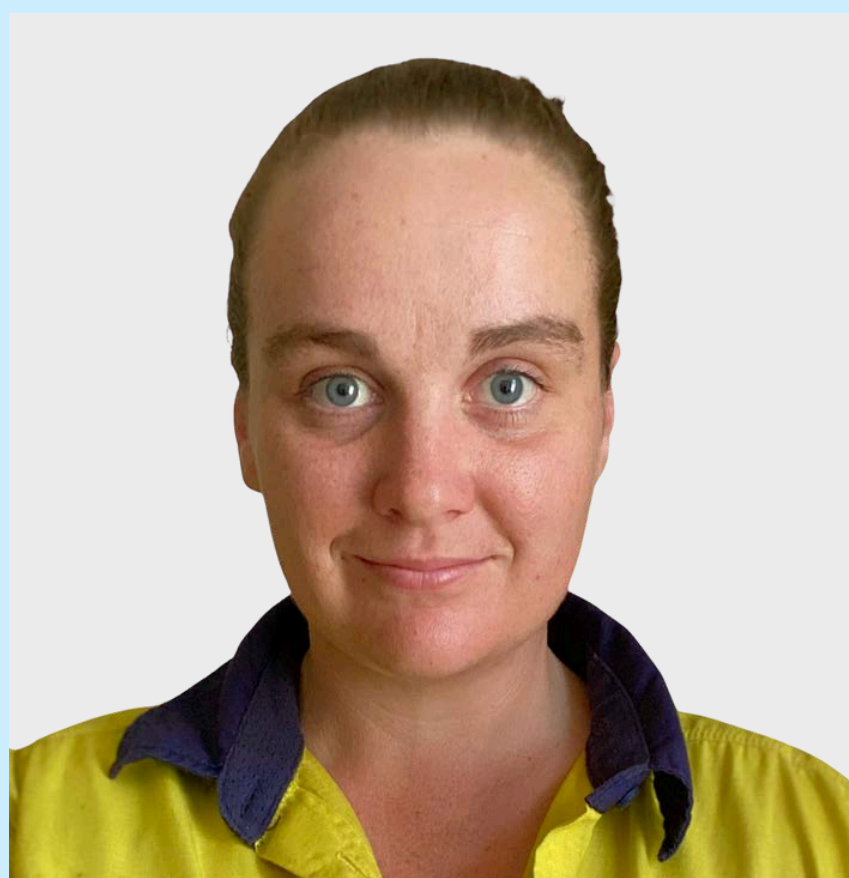
While completing his heavy vehicle apprenticeship Travis Chaffey found himself in an environment where he could truly thrive, and he hasn't looked back. Growing up on a farm in Tamworth, he's never been a stranger to heavy machinery and fixing things, and it's through this upbringing that Travis decided that a hands-on career in mechanics would be the perfect fit. When he found himself at Double R, Travis realised he'd found the place he was meant to be, and he's not only broadened his technical expertise but also built resilience and confidence.

In 2024 Travis competed in Isuzu's National Technical Skills Competition, placing second in Australia, and has since set his sights on competing internationally. Travis is committed to supporting fellow apprentices and is excited to continue his growth at Double R while making a meaningful contribution to the team.

Apprentice of the Year Finalist



Shaani Monson



Qualification

Certificate III in Mobile Plant Technology

Trained by

TAFE NSW

Employed by

Zeal Futures

Hosted by

Maules Creek Coal Pty Ltd

Shaani Monson built her career path based on a love for farmwork and heavy machinery. After years in the industry, she found her calling as a Mobile Plant Technician; mastering skills in breakdown diagnostics, general servicing, and equipment rebuilds. During her apprenticeship, she worked on a variety of equipment, from small generators to massive diggers and wheel loaders.

Through vocational education & training Shaani was able to benefit from both teachers with a working understanding of the industry and the unmatched support of her mentors, Mel and Gavin. As one of only two women in her class, Shaani overcame initial nerves to become a mentor and role model for those around her. Her journey reflects her resilience and commitment, making Shaani a shining example of excellence in the industry.



Apprentice of the Year Finalist

Shane Woodward

Qualification

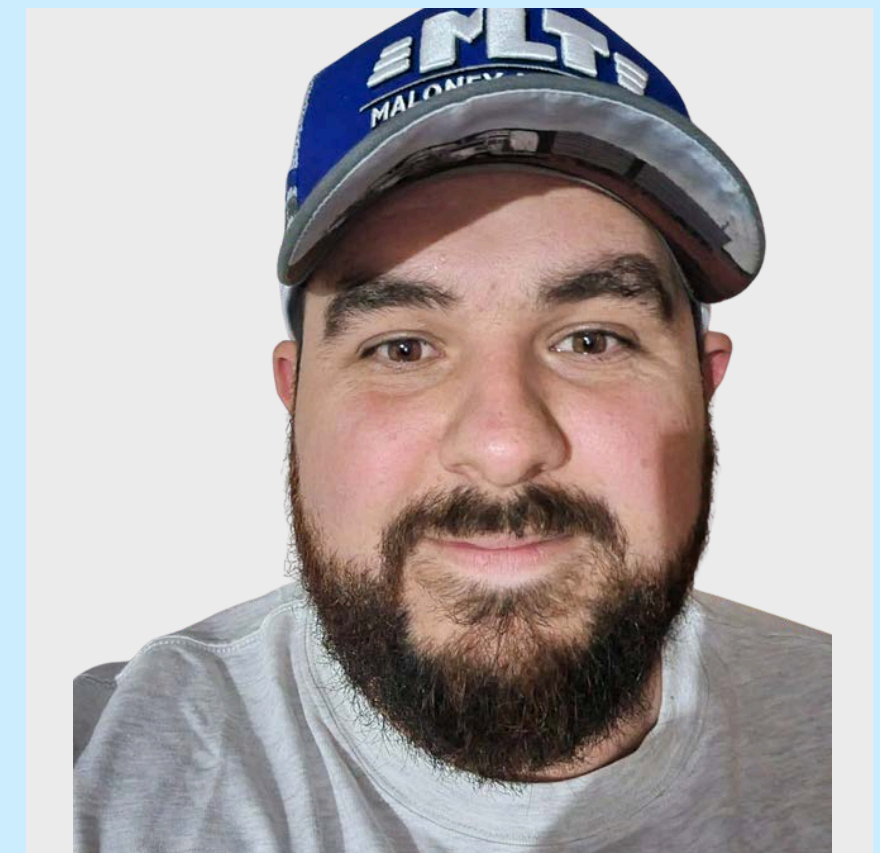
Certificate III in Heavy Commercial Vehicle
Mechanical Technology

Trained by

TAFE NSW

Employed by

Glen Artney Truck Repairs



Shane Woodward always wanted to be a mechanic but after leaving school early to support his family he found himself 12 years on working in a different industry to where he really wanted to be. Having built a stable foundation for his family, Shane was ready for a new challenge and a chance to explore mechanics as a career. In choosing to pursue a mature-age apprenticeship as a heavy diesel mechanic, Shane was on his new path and loving it. His skills have broadened, and he's gained insights that continue to serve him well in both work and life.

Beyond excelling professionally and personally, Shane also leverages his life skills to mentor fellow colleagues and enhancing his workplace. Shane's apprenticeship experience has made his introduction to the trade both rewarding and impactful.

Thank You



New England Training Services would like to thank everyone for their support and involvement in the success of the 2025 NSW Training Awards New England Region.

In particular, the selection panels who dedicated their time and expertise to assess the nominees and select the finalists and winners across the awards categories:

Bede Maher, Libbi Redden, Pauline Bush, Matt Frew, Nicky Turner, Keryl Caufield, Georgia Johnson, Rob Walters, Jayden Townsend, Luke Bridge, Kayla Wilson, Naomi Spark, Simone Williams, Melissa Penrose, Gabby Ward, Jacinta Russell, Cameron Howard, Bianca Freestone, Mel Wellard

An event of this magnitude in a regional setting is not possible without the fantastic assistance and support from local services including:

- Tamworth Regional Council for this wonderful venue
- The Firey Cook for their catering
- AM Printing for the sign on the front of the Lectern
- Oxley High School – Hospitality Students
- Tess Reading – Photography

Thank you everybody for your involvement to help us recognise and celebrate talented individuals pursuing vocation education and training pathways in the New England region.

