

Jobs success for disabled

CELEBRATING their 20th anniversary, the team at Key Employment were keen to celebrate the success of KIKASS – aimed at helping students with disabilities get jobs.

The Kids in Key's Apprenticeship Support Scheme (KIKASS) pays a year's wages in total to employers who provide a four-year indentured apprenticeship for eligible students.

"For too long local students with disabilities have been missing out on the apprenticeship opportunities available to able bodied students," said Key Employment chief executive officer Chris Worboys. "We have developed a program to fix that. We get these kids to KIKASS."

The KIKASS program supports students at high school to prepare for work, by tailoring training to their chosen career, connecting them to an apprenticeship and then helping them keep it.

In its first full year KIKASS has found 40 apprenticeships for students with disabilities across the region – 30 of these in Coffs Harbour.

"Some kids are only in school marking time. Kids who are handy with their hands are often rubbish with Pythagoras".

"Once we find they're eligible, we will put them into job readiness training – such as green cards, OH&S and jobsearch training – we offer them lots of support."

Key Employment Schools consultant Simon Booth visits local high schools, working with teachers to develop a list of students who may be eligible for KIKASS, then the teachers, parents and students are supported to meet the students' goals.

"At the end of the day, we believe in the talents and abilities of our



NEW SPONSORS: The Key Employment team stand behind the players they now sponsor – the regional wheelchair basketball team – at the 20th anniversary celebration at SportzCentral.

PHOTO: BRUCE THOMAS

students and we put our money where our mouth is by providing support and the first year's wages."

In 2010 Key Employment invested over \$145 000 in the scheme.

"We believe this cost is well worth it as what we and the general

community gain are 40 kids who will learn a trade, pay tax and never know what an income support benefit such as Newstart or the disability support pension is."

Apprenticeships are wanted in building, hospitality, automotive,

hairdressing and horticulture fields.

During the 20th anniversary celebrations at SportzCentral this week, Key Employment announced their sponsorship of the regional wheelchair basketball team, with

\$2000 this year and \$1000 for the next three years.

Australian international wheelchair basketball player Bill Latham and some visiting Spanish international players put on an exhibition match with the local team.

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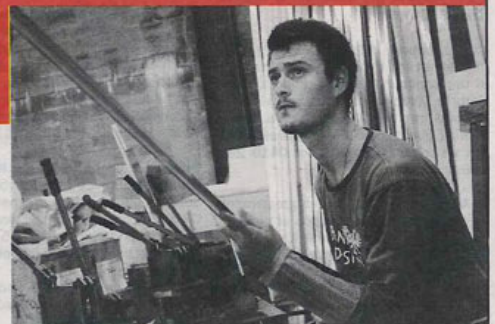
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AS a registered training organisation, Key Employment can offer vocationally accredited training for job seekers of all descriptions.

Among the courses Key Employment offers are certificates in training and assessment, frontline management, business, business administration and retail, all recognised by Vocational Education and Training Board (VETAB).

Short courses can also be offered to address skills shortages in organisations or locations.

"For instance, if there's a shortage of baristas in the region, we can run a short course," said Key Employment chief executive officer Chris Worboys.

Among the people supported by Key Employment are workers who find themselves unable to continue in long-term careers due to injury.

"We often have the greatest success with the older age group, who are keen to keep working," Mr Worboys said.

"If you're a tradesman and you have a sore back, then we could help you by retraining you to work in TAFE as a teacher, as a quantity surveyor, pricing work for a construction company, lots of different jobs.

"We're rebuilding people all the

time."

The primary focus for Key Employment is not just the recognised training they provide – it's supporting jobseekers who have traditionally missed out on opportunities.

"I want to find work for my clients. I'd like them to have a bigger share of the opportunities out there," Mr Worboys said.

People with disabilities and those who have been out of work for years are especially welcome at Key Employment.

"We have a number of clients who are fairly anxious about returning to work and we found that one way to help them was to bring them into a group," Mr Worboys said.

"By running short courses, like art therapy classes, we find after a few weeks they are ready to go onto the next thing.

"Then, we'll connect them with other job preparation and readiness courses.

"In the 20 years, Key Employment has operated on the Mid North Coast, supported clients have earned more than \$55m in wages and paid \$11m in taxes.

"Where many see a wheelchair and think problem, we see the person in the wheelchair and think salesperson, administrator or accountant."



KEY TEAM: Three members of the management team of Key Employment: John Davis, Chris Worboys and Stewart Robertson.

PHOTO: BRUCE THOMAS

"I want to find work for my clients. I'd like them to have a bigger share of the opportunities out there

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KiKASS is Key

PAYING employers a year's wages to take on one of its clients is a big incentive for business to pick up the phone to Key Employment.

In the first year of providing the incentive for employers willing to offer indentured apprenticeships to Key Employment clients, 40 locals have gained jobs in the Kids in Key's Apprenticeship Support Scheme (KiKASS).

"We've got a girl who was struggling a little bit at school and all of a sudden her life has taken a dramatic left turn and she's now on her way to gaining secure employment," Quality Inn Coffs Harbour owner Michael Dougherty said.

"No doubt the money gives you an incentive to pick up the phone, but the person still has to be suitable for the work and able to stick it out," Mr Dougherty said.

"It's in our interests to train people in the skills we need, but she probably wouldn't be here if it wasn't for a program like Key Employment's KiKASS."

KiKASS consultant Simon Booth, visits schools to meet with teachers and students and explain how the program can help them gain an apprenticeship.

Once students are found eligible, Key Employment staff assesses their skills and provides them with job readiness training and finds employers willing to



TRAINING: Cameron Murdoch has been successfully placed in employment.

offer them a job in their field of interest.

For the Quality Inn, KiKASS is an extension of the support Key Employment has offered it and its placed employees with disabilities over the past 12 years in hospitality, cooking and gardening.

"We've got quite a long relationship and have built up a fair bit of trust and understanding. Key supports their people here quite well - if we do have any issues - they come out and sort it out."

Currently four Quality Inn employees were placed by Key Employment, including Ben, a kitchen hand with cerebral palsy, who has worked there for more than 10 years.

"Key did all the work - for the KiKASS apprenticeship they narrowed down the field to two applicants who could do the job and brought her in - it was too easy."

"We find the workers to be extremely reliable and appreciative of the opportunity."

Key Employment finds reliability and loyalty to be characteristics of many jobseekers with a disability.

Certainly, there are many good success stories and we know our people can be very loyal," said Key Employment chief executive officer Chris Worboys.

"Research from the States suggests people with disabilities are more reliable, have less absenteeism and are safer - perhaps they are more careful - I don't know why," Mr Worboys said.

"Employers frustrated with a high turnover of staff may find our people are more likely to be content in less skilled work."

Key Employment is seeking apprenticeships for KiKASS clients in fields of hairdressing, building, automotive, hospitality and parks and gardens.



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