



Australian Government

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Serving the community

St Laurence Community Services Inc.

Geelong region



The innovative approach to training at St Laurence Community Services Inc. means it has retained 80 per cent of its Australian Apprentices.

‘Given the present economic downturn we think this is an absolutely fantastic result,’ says Training Manager Linda Sahajdak.

St Laurence Community Services operates in more than 25 sites across southern and western Victoria.

This not-for-profit organisation offers specialist services to support older people and people experiencing disadvantage.

The organisation employs more than 500 staff, as well as 320 active volunteers, 25 Australian Apprentices and seven newly-graduated apprentices and trainees.

Linda says the scope of the organisation’s services is so diverse that it needs to employ and train people with many different qualifications.

‘The main program for our current Australian Apprentices is Certificate III in Home and Community Care, so they are qualified to work in our home support section which supports older citizens and people with a disability to stay in their homes for as long as possible,’ Linda says.

‘We have also had many trainees completing Certificate III in Business Administration and the Certificate IV in Employment Services has been popular.’

All Australian Apprentices are given a mentor to help them with day to day work and assignments. These are generally people who have completed a similar qualification, so they really understand what an apprentice or trainee has to do.

‘For example, with the Home and Community Care Australian Apprentices, their mentors have completed a similar qualification. We’ve found that aligning Australian Apprentices to a mentor from a similar background helps retain the trainee and assists them to complete the qualification,’ Linda says.

‘And our retention rates reflects this, with most Australian Apprentices staying on after they complete their qualification.’

Since 2006, 69 trainees have signed up as Australian Apprentices. Twenty-six have completed their training and 25 staff recently commenced Certificate IV in Disability in May this year. There is a real adult learning culture.

‘We’re continuously improving our training methods. We’ve introduced paid classroom-based training each fortnight which has a high attendance rate,’ Linda says.

For St Laurence Community Services, the main benefit of employing Australian Apprentices is a skilled workforce. Since embracing the Australian Apprenticeships program, they have noticed a definite improvement in staff quality and productivity.

'Our strong focus on developing our staff, and in a lot of cases recognising the skills they already have, is our strength,' Linda says.

'Sometimes you have someone that has been working for 20 years and may be scared to go back and study, so we encourage and support them to recognise their skills by gaining a certificate through workplace based training.'

Robert Birch, Manager of G-Force Australian Apprenticeship Centre praises St Laurence Community Services for its dedication to training.

'What we've noticed is their commitment to providing opportunities to people to do an Australian Apprenticeship. I think they've shown they go the extra step of inducting staff properly and giving them the opportunity to do ongoing training,' Robert says.

With so many new staff under the Australian Apprenticeships program, existing employees are recognising the benefits of training and are eager to undertake further training and qualifications.

