



EMERALD IS A MINING TOWN IN CENTRAL QUEENSLAND, A PLACE WHERE MEGA TRUCKS RULE THE STREETS. BUT A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO BUSY AT WORK BROUGHT THIS BUSTLING TOWN TO A STANDSTILL: STAFF, DRESSED AS CHARACTERS FROM *THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY*, LASSOED APPRENTICES FROM THEIR WORKPLACES AND, WITH THE HELP OF POLICE, SHOVED THEM INTO JAIL CELLS.

No, it wasn't a result of the latest government contract, but the brainchild of BUSY's CEO, Vivienne Mallinson.

'It was part of our 30th anniversary celebration,' she laughs. 'We told all our offices to video something that would depict their area. But first my team and I down in Southport videoed ourselves dressed up as Charlie's Angels – and sent them that as an example!'

UK-born Vivienne joined Charlie – sorry BUSY – 19 years ago and has loved every minute. Nonprofit BUSY Inc. began in Southport working amongst Gold Coast street kids, but since 1998, after failing to get a contract at the onset of Job Network, has been an Australian Apprenticeships Centre. When Vivienne began there were five staff. Now there are 180 in 15 offices across Queensland, dealing annually with 20,000 apprenticeships and traineeships.

'We have gone from a cottage industry to where we are now,' Vivienne reflects, adding that before July this year BUSY also handled Job Placement. 'Because we didn't get JSA, Job Placement disappeared, but we have rebranded it. The plan is to do fee for service, but also offer free services for disadvantaged people.'

For Vivienne, it's vital that BUSY retains its roots in helping the severely disadvantaged. She's aware of the need to function like any other corporate entity, but doesn't want that to affect BUSY's caring culture.

'If we just did what's in our contract, we would go out and sign up apprentices, get them into an apprenticeship, and then do all their compliance. But we encourage our staff to get involved in their communities, go over and beyond.'

This has taken BUSY on some interesting journeys. A male apprentice had trouble keeping his job due to a marriage break-up. He was sleeping in his car, so BUSY staff worked with

local homeless agencies to get a roof over his head. Another young apprentice became involved with drugs and BUSY worked with him, his employer and drug services to ensure he got a second chance. And, famously, BUSY supported Australia's youngest apprentice.

'It was on *A Current Affair*,' Vivienne explains, adding that the case ended up offering good publicity for BUSY, but could easily have gone the other way. 'I was quite alarmed and thought, What are we getting into here? Is this child labour?'

The 12-year-old boy had disengaged during his first year of senior school. Dropped off each morning, he'd disappear from the grounds. His principal and parents were at their wits end when BUSY secured him an apprenticeship.

'He'd always been interested in dirt bikes – he went riding with his father on weekends. So we found him an apprenticeship with an employer who worked on small engines.'

BUSY closely monitored his progress and he later re-engaged with school. 'He was able to connect his work with maths, and he left school in Year 10 to take up a full-time apprenticeship.'

Vivienne agrees it's important for young people to stay at school, but says it's time apprenticeships in our community were afforded the same status that comes with attending university.

'It's changing, but we went through more than a decade where if you didn't go to uni you 'failed', if you went to uni you 'passed'. The kudos for apprenticeships is lifting, the balance is coming. And that's what we need.'

As well as plenty of fun at work.

Despite this being an uncertain time for BUSY at Work, with contract extensions but no requests to tender, Vivienne leads from the front when it comes to morale.

'People say I'm always laughing, but I love what I do... I love the people I work with – the staff, the clients.'

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS IN EMPLOYMENT SERVICES...

I've learnt that...
*the faces may change but
the issues remain the same.*

the one change I'd like
to see...
*is daylight saving in
Queensland!*

the things that keeps me
going...
*are the challenges, the
passion, the people, and
the medication I take!*

it's not fashionable to admit
it but...
*I miss the family of Skillshare,
and having local solutions for
local issues. Also '60s music.*

the question I'd most like an
answer to is...
*why - with all the wealth in
the world - there is so much
poverty and cruelty.*

