

## Variety and learning at Moree

Like many NSW councils, Moree Plains Shire Council finds it difficult to attract staff into its planning and development roles, and, in particular, its building surveying roles.

“I came to Moree from the City of Sydney Council earlier this year,” says Daniel Boyce, the Council’s Assessment Manager. “Even in Sydney we struggled to attract interest in building surveying positions, but this is obviously a bigger issue in regional councils.

“Here at Moree, we’ve had a senior building surveying role that has been vacant for around five years. We’ve had to use private contractors to fill this role and we accept that we’ll struggle to attract external candidates for this position so we’ll need to train people from within.”



(L to R): Daniel Boyce (Assessment Manager), Kevin Dennison (Environmental Area Officer), Dwayne Singh (Trainee Building Surveyor and Lester Rodgers (Director of Planning and Development).

Daniel says Council now has two indigenous employees who are doing excellent work in their field, while learning on the job.

“Dwayne Singh has been with us for about 18 months - he’s a Trainee Building Surveyor, while Kevin Dennison is our Environmental Area Officer and has been here for seven years,” Daniel explains.

“Kevin qualified with a Diploma of Health and Building Surveying some ten years ago and has specialised mainly in environmental and public health at South Sydney Council and now at Moree. He is also undertaking some assessment and certification on Class 1 and 10 buildings in his role here.

“Dwayne is an aspiring young professional who is currently completing the Diploma of Building Surveying through OTEN and is in a traditional trainee building surveying/accredited certifier role here at Moree.

“Dwayne has a carpentry and building construction background so he’s especially strong on critical stage inspections that he undertakes under my supervision – his knowledge and skills in this area are far more advanced than you would expect from a second year trainee.”

Moree Council has an Aboriginal Employment Strategy which targets a 20 per cent indigenous workforce by 2020. Currently sitting at a 12.3 per cent indigenous workforce, Moree Council not only prides itself on participation rates, but also retention and "success at all levels" amongst its indigenous employees.

However, both Dwayne and Kevin's positions were not identified specifically for members of the indigenous community, as both men were successful from a strong pool of candidates from all sections of the public.

Daniel says his team is exposed to certification work they wouldn't see in the city.

"We experience a variety of certification work here given that there are no private certifiers operating within our Shire," he says. "From aircraft hangars to nursing homes – Council is the certifying authority for them all. This makes Moree an ideal place for someone like Dwayne to develop into a well rounded building surveyor.

"Our LEP is being finalised, which will bring forward a lot of commercial and industrial development. As well, one of the biggest solar plants in the world, covering an area of over 1200 hectares and at a cost of approximately \$700 million, will get under way in 2012. This will attract between 400 and 500 workers, and there'll be a lot of development - and certification work - required for all the new housing to accommodate them."

For Dwayne, this variety is what he enjoys about his position.

"There's plenty of work going on here in Moree," he says. "We get to look at different areas of building surveying and different aspects of work, rather than just specialising in, for example, only fire safety.

"Under supervision from Daniel, I undertake water sampling, plumbing and critical stage inspections, private swimming pool inspections and proactive fire safety inspections on high-risk residential buildings – there's a lot of things to do.

"I guess if I was working in the city I'd be a specialist in one field, but in a regional area I'm exposed to so much more – then having the building background gives me the confidence to step up to the plate on critical stage inspections even though I'm still a Trainee."



*Dwayne Singh undertakes an inspection on site.*

Dwayne got into the position almost by chance.

"I was in a trade for six years, moving around working for different firms and not getting a lot of recognition for my work. I was doing a job – installing a kitchen for one of the building surveyors at Council, and he told me about the profession and told me I'd thrive in it, so when a position came up I applied.

"There's more for me here in the long-run," Dwayne explains. "The job is not as hard on the body as carpentry and I have a better guarantee of work being with the Council. But I'm also learning a whole new set of skills, learning about all the different legislation, codes and standards.

"I'm also studying part-time, so I work back in the office a few afternoons a week and come in on weekends to get the study done. We've set up a training plan to try to fast-track my study so I can knock over the course in around three years. Then I'm hoping to get a graduate building surveying role with the Council."

Dwayne believes the benefits and profile of the building surveying profession need to be better publicised both to the public and to young people thinking of entering the building industry.

"Building surveying is a great career in itself but can also be a stepping stone into other fields – you could stay with council, or work for a private company, or you might specialise in disabled access, fire safety, bushfire protection, or you can even transfer to an allied professions such as town planning or architecture – it's a great basis for a variety of career paths."