

Beyond brick and mortar

How Fairbrother is building futures with Apprenticeships



Executive summary

Fairbrother, an award-winning commercial and industrial construction, joinery, and facilities management company, has established a successful apprenticeship program, with **91% of apprentices completing since 2012, garnering national recognition and multiple awards.**

We sat down with Matthew Scrimgeour who leads their apprenticeship program. He shared his experiences and learning from recruiting young people as apprentices, and how this assists them to deliver excellence on each and every project they undertake.

Their holistic approach involves not only skills training but also community engagement, mentorship, and on-the-job learning experiences. In addition to hands-on training, apprentices are supported to develop critical life skills including financial literacy, personal values, and goal-setting.

Matthew underscores the importance of a people-centered approach, advising other employers to invest in their apprentices for long-term rewards, highlighting that young people will inevitably end up better equipped for life.

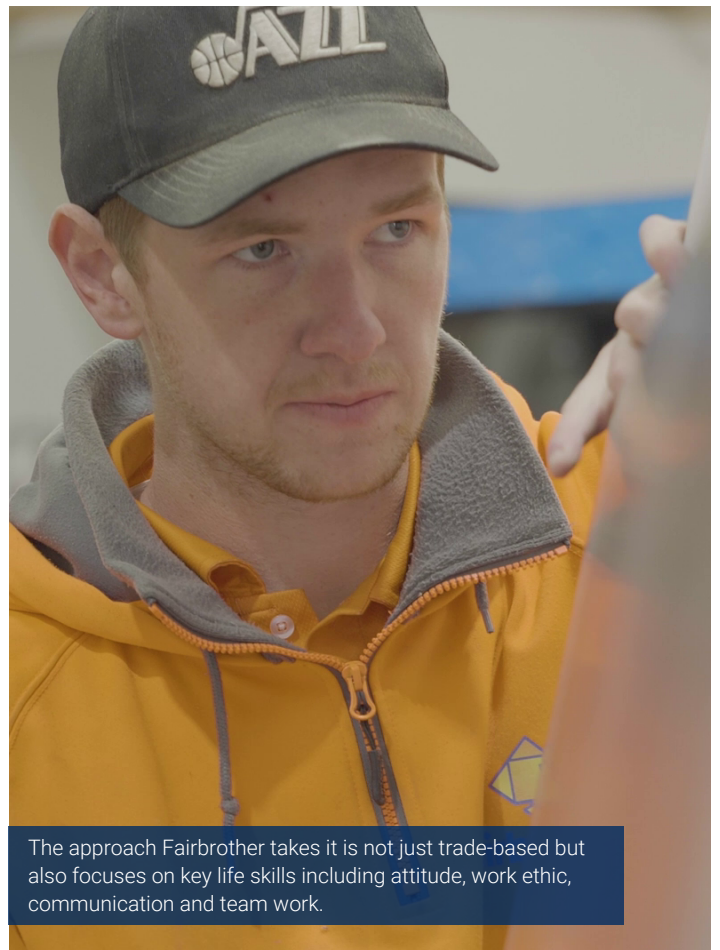
About Fairbrother

Fairbrother is a National award-winning commercial and industrial construction, joinery and facilities management company employing 372 staff in Tasmania and Regional Victoria.

Investing in our people like this has given us the best results in the long term. We are proud to have gone down this path and get the outcomes we have.



Matthew Scrimgeour
Apprentice Program Manager,
Fairbrother



The approach Fairbrother takes it is not just trade-based but also focuses on key life skills including attitude, work ethic, communication and team work.

What prompted action?

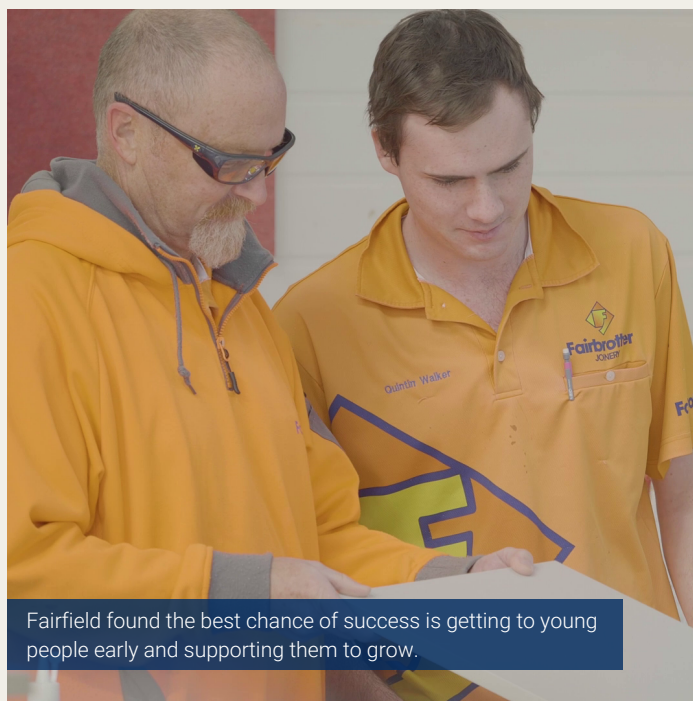
Fairbrother has employed apprentices for almost as long as it's 50 year history. Over time they found the best chance of success is getting to young people early and supporting them to grow.

"Experience told us that, as a business, starting young people straight out of high school and college provided the best pathway to find and train our future leaders and sustainably expand our business," said Matthew.

"If we want the right people in the right positions we need to start from the ground up, support apprentices through their trade and provide opportunities for them to work their way up."

The approach Fairbrother takes it is not just trade-based but also focuses on key life skills including attitude, work ethic, communication and team work.

"If we can invest a bit into them aside from trade training i.e. life skills training - cover off on other aspects that make an employee happy in the workplace and fulfilled in life in general, then everyone benefits – the employee, us, their families and the broader community. Better apprentices also lift the bar across the industry, so the industry as a whole benefits in a lot of different trades."



What was done?

Matthew explained that "widening the net to get more people interested and available for employment has been a real success for us. We get involved with local schools, high schools, colleges and community groups, conducting presentations to promote construction through Master Builders Tasmania or attending school careers events, telling young people about opportunities in trades and the construction industry. We like to let young people know of the excellent opportunities that exist, but that they will need to work hard for them".

Fairbrother has also built strong relationships with community organisations, such as the Beacon Foundation.

"Giving time, resources and support to speak or be a business mentor (for example) contributes favourably to how our business seen in the community," Matthew continued. This work opens up Fairbrother to a broader pool of talent.

The next step is to get interested young people to experience the reality of working. Matthew says, "The key thing we've found that has been most successful for us in doing that is getting them out on work experience".

"For a young person to make a good decision about employment, they need to come and try Fairbrother. They need to go and try the other building company down the road and the other business up the street and decide that is where they want to go". For Fairbrother, work experience opportunities are critical to this. It gives them a chance to see the young people and assess how they would fit.

This is a whole of business effort, Matthew explained - and it's seeing clear results. Last year, Fairbrother set up 83 work experience opportunities for young people. Of 16 young people selected for the 2022 apprentice program, 15 had taken part in work experience beforehand - 94% of the total apprentice group.

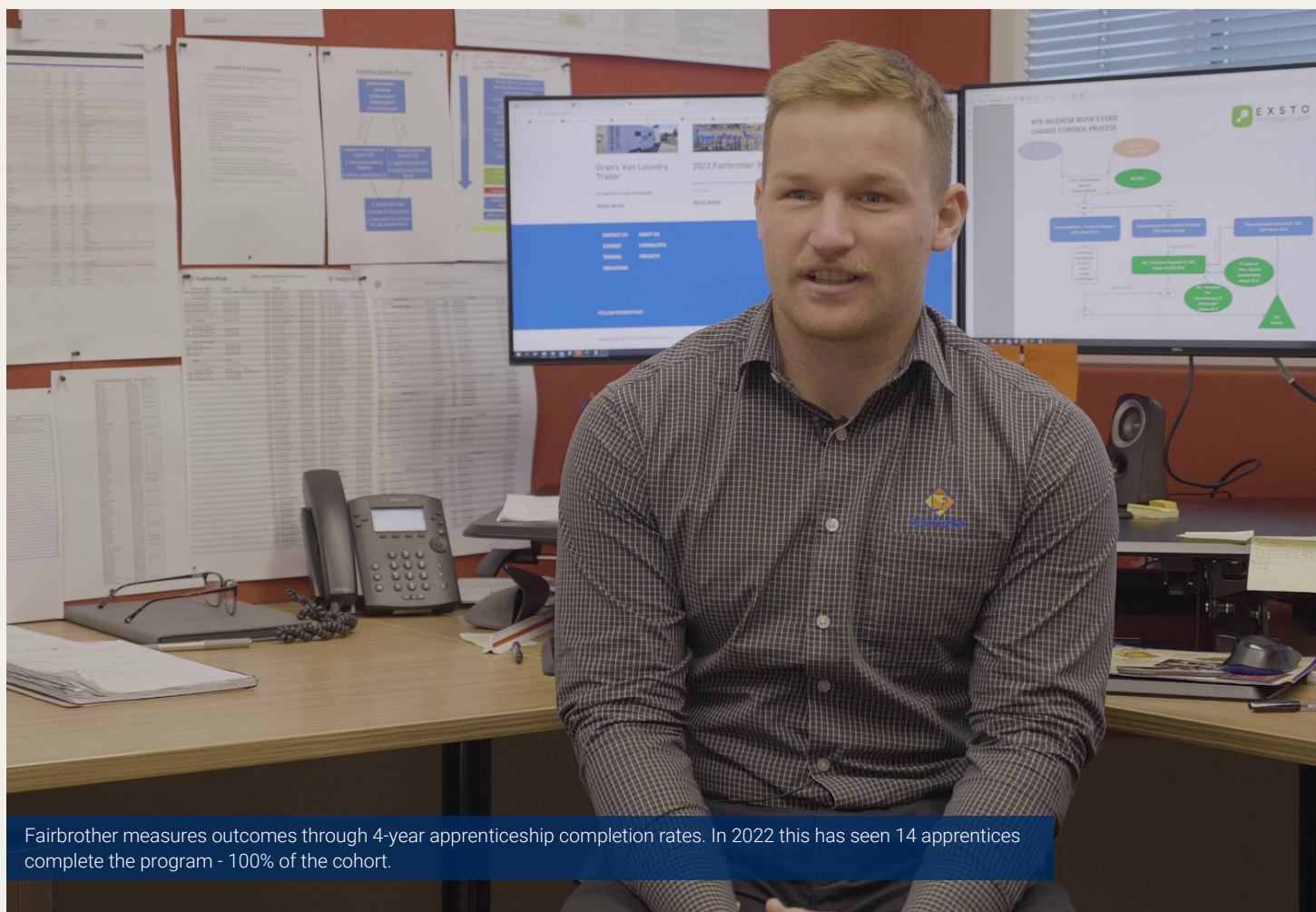
What resources were needed?

The main resource Fairbrother has given is time: this includes time spent engaging with schools and colleges, time supporting work experience placements and new apprenticeships. Fairbrother has evolved its approach to the apprenticeship program to become more holistic. Matthew said, "It's been a gradual process of responding to needs and opportunities, to progress young people in the business as they get more experienced."

The first step Fairbrother took was to designate mentors onsite and in the workshops to guide apprentices. Mentors are staff known to have the right demeanor: a calm, supportive and mature outlook. They are asked to take part (which they can decline) and then provided mentor-specific training. There is no specific benefit for mentors to do this; it is part of the Fairbrother culture, Matthew explains "Our mentors have told us that the rewards come from mentoring young people to learn, build and navigate professional relationships and thrive on the job".

Mentors provide monthly written feedback through apprentice appraisals. This is important to provide positive feedback and constructive criticism so the individual apprentice knows where they can improve and know where they are doing well.

Next, in addition to trade training, apprentices are supported to develop key life skills including financial literacy, personal values and goal setting. Most of this work has been taken on by Fairbrother staff including the CEO, Executives and Board members supplemented by some local external community organisations such as Lifeline. Also, all apprentices have access to an employee assistance provider (EAP) with free counselling and other training available.



Fairbrother measures outcomes through 4-year apprenticeship completion rates. In 2022 this has seen 14 apprentices complete the program - 100% of the cohort.

What was the impact?

For the most part, Fairbrother measures outcomes through 4-year apprenticeship completion rates. In 2022 this has seen 14 apprentices complete the program - 100% of the cohort. Fairbrother is proud to report that, since 2012, over 91% of its apprentices have completed (95% if you include those who stayed in the industry but changed employer).

Matthew feels this is down to the hands-on support Fairbrother provide to the apprentices as they go through the program. "If an apprentice is not performing, we try to figure out, support them – whether this is personal issues, role issues, workplace conflict etc. We made a decision to employ them, they may hit a few speed bumps but that's life, we do our best to help get them back on track," he says.

This human-centered approach is clearly working for the apprenticeships and those supporting them, Matthew says. "I have seen young people go down some pretty hard roads but come out the other side as good quality employees and young people. When they hang around and stick it out, it's very rewarding."

Fairbrother has also been recognised for this work at the National and State level:

- Australian Training Awards, won the 2020 Australian Apprenticeships – Employer Award
- 7 Apprentices have won the National Master Builders Apprentice of the Year award since 2003
- 11 Tasmanian Master Builders Apprentice of Year winners since 2003

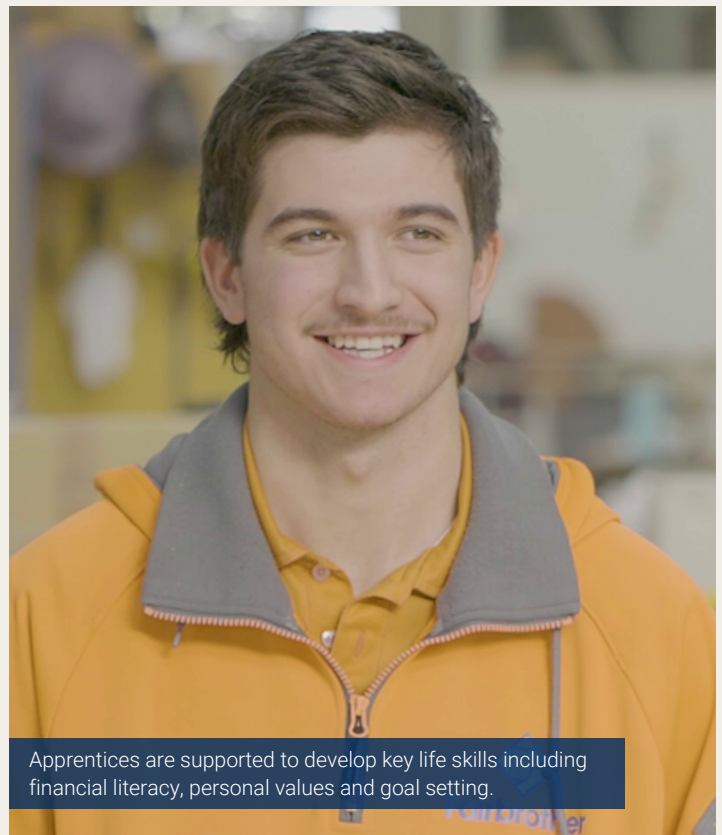
Insights for employers

"It all depends on the size of the business," Matthew explains. "Larger business can more easily fund some additional supports – but really any support that can be offered to young people will help. There are some great Australian Apprenticeship Network providers who offer free resources, complimentary counselling and mentoring services"

"Investing in our people like this has given us the best results in the long term, we are proud to have gone down this path and get the outcomes we have. As a business we strive to put 'Our people above all else', and this company value is captured with how we run our Apprentice Program".

"I really enjoy seeing apprentices starting out green and seeing them progress physically and mentally into top quality tradies".

"If you can get the right people around the young person, it will improve something, even if they don't stay in the industry – they finish better than they would have".



Apprentices are supported to develop key life skills including financial literacy, personal values and goal setting.



SVA