



Cairns City Council Events and Civic Relations Coordinator Glenda McAuliffe

COUNCIL SERIOUS ABOUT RETAINING OLDER EMPLOYEES - Cairns City Council

Cairns City Council must be doing something right when it comes to age-friendly employment practices – employees just don't want to leave!

Human Resource Consultant Christine Posgate said Council employs 1200 people of which more than 40% are over the age of 45 years.

“Most council employees work to retirement age and beyond,” said Christine.

“We offer good working conditions and flexible work options.”

Fifty-nine-year-old Glenda McAuliffe has been with Cairns City Council for 19 years and chooses to stay working as an Events and Civic Relations Coordinator instead of retiring.

“If you enjoy your job, you have good health and you know you are still making a valuable contribution, why would you want to retire to go home and grow marigolds for the next 10 years,” said Glenda.

“And it's lovely being financially independent, having five weeks paid holiday a year as a reward, and a purpose to get up in the morning and get your 'glad-rags' and 'war paint' on ready for the day - you can't beat that!

“The young ones keep us feeling young and teach us new skills, while we mature workers provide them with the knowledge learnt over our many years of living and experience in the workforce.”

Glenda organises Council events like Carols by Candlelight, meeting many dignitaries and members of the community in her job.

“It's a fabulous and rewarding job,” said Glenda

“Cairns City Council has been an excellent employer - as the saying goes 'you reap what you sow'!”.

Christine said employees like Glenda are highly valued by Council for the experience and enthusiasm they bring to the job.

“We'd be lost without her, she has a wealth of knowledge,” said Christine.

While Glenda is not thinking of bowing out yet some employees are preparing to retire so Cairns City Council has adopted strategies to retain mature-age employees while assisting their transition into retirement.

“We offer flexible work options like part-time work, utilising long-service leave or working from home - we are open minded to all options,” said Christine.

“For example Laird Shepherd is a Project Officer in Strategic Planning and has been with Council for over 43 years.

“Laird is 65 and has a great deal of corporate knowledge and experience which we don’t want to lose.”

For the last five years Laird has been working a four-day week, and taking the other day as long-service leave.

“I appreciate Council’s flexibility on my hours which I could reduce further if I wished,” said Laird.

“I get a great deal of satisfaction from contributing to the job.

“Working past 65 is stimulating - it keeps me engaged with the world around me.”

In addition to his core duties Laird’s position has taken on an advisory and mentoring role so his experience and knowledge can be documented and passed on.

“You couldn’t replace Laird – think about the adaptations he has had to make over 40 years,” said Christine.

“And he has an incredible capacity to take on technology - he is quite comfortable with email and computer systems.”

While Council works to retain its older employees, mature-age jobseekers can be reassured when applying for a position with Cairns City Council that selections are made in a recruitment process which includes an age-is-no-barrier policy.

“We look at an applicant’s skills and how they can be adapted to the job,” said Christine.

“All interviews are headed by an accredited chair who ensures there is no discrimination in the process and people are selected based on their merit.”

Llew Beaton, now 63 , was employed by Council in 2003, as a Technical Officer with City Development and Town Planning.

Llew was unemployed for several years beforehand and had experienced a great deal of age-discrimination when applying for work.

“At that time I found anyone who was over 45 or 50 was rejected in the workforce – a lot of older people could not get a job,” said Llew.

Llew moved to Cairns in 2001 with many years experience in town planning in South Africa and Western Australia under his belt, but a 15-year break from the field left a gap in his skills base.



Cairns City Council Technical Officer Llew Beaton with his Alfa Romeo Spider sports car

“I didn’t have any computer skills and couldn’t get a job for a number of years – it was almost humiliating.”

Llew completed a course in basic computer skills with Centacare Cairns which boosted his confidence and helped him secure the position with Council.

Llew has since proved his worth in a demanding position which includes assessing development applications, considering environmental issues, research work, report writing and working to tight timeframes.

In 2006 Council offered an incentive that would inspire Llew to remain working for the next three to five years – an Alfa Romeo Spider sports car.

Llew salary sacrifices into a private lease arrangement with Council and SMB Fleet Management so that he can drive his dream car.

“This is a life long ambition fulfilled and a great incentive to work beyond 65,” said Llew.

“As long as my health holds out, why not?”

Cairns City Council can see the value in retaining the knowledge and skills of employees like Llew and offer working options to suit individual needs.

“People should be able to work in the role they want, for as long as they want to,” said Christine.