

Women in Welding: Mackenzie Gulland, Argyle Engineering

Mackenzie Gulland is one of the only female boilermakers in the Kimberley region, which is over 3,000km away from the hustle and bustle of Perth. But Gulland is far from a statistic. From a young age, she knew that sitting behind a desk and completing paperwork was not her vision for the future. Instead, she desired a career in a hands-on environment – either building or mechanics. After completing high school, Gulland took on a role at Argyle Engineering in Kununurra as a trades assistant.

Established in 1985, Argyle Engineering has grown to service all parts of fabrication in steel, stainless steel, aluminium and polyethylene across the Kimberley region and beyond. Gulland is a member of Argyle Engineering's strong team of staff, which operate from a 940m² workshop.

Since joining the Argyle Engineering team, Gulland has continued her education with a Certificate III in Engineering – Fabrication Trade. Gulland's daily tasks at Argyle Engineering may involve oxy cutting, grinding, steel cutting, or assembly, based on detailed shop drawings and plans. While it may be hard work, particularly in the blistering heat of northern Australia, Gulland believes it is worth the reward.

Women make up just 2% of trades positions around Australia, and just 1% of the Australian welding workforce. Gulland's boss, Jesse Chamberlain, said that while she is only the third woman boilermaker he has seen in the course of his 16 year career in the industry, Gulland is a strong addition to the team.

"She's fantastic, females all round in our trade have better finesse, and are much neater and cleaner workers than the males are," he said. "She brings character and something different to the norm, she's great to have in the workshop."

While she may be an exception, Gulland is confident that she will see change in the sector. At just 19, she is focused, resilient and determined to put her hard work on show in a male-dominated workplace. Gulland believes there are several benefits and opportunities for women who are seeking a career in trades, and urges her female counterparts to join her and give a career in welding a red hot go.

Gulland took time out to answer some questions about her welding career so far.

Describe your job.

I am currently a second year apprentice at Argyle Engineering in Kununurra. I will become a third year apprentice on 18 April 2021. At Argyle, I work on all kinds of projects, which consist of mine site work (both at the site and in the workshop), as well as work that customers bring into the workshop. The tasks that I undertake mainly involve fabricating both light and heavy materials, reading drawings, and cleaning the workshop.

What inspired you to choose a career in welding?

At the beginning of 2018, I started working at Argyle Engineering as a yardie and a rubber liner. After working there for a couple of months, and seeing what the boys in the shop were doing, I became intrigued. I asked my boss, Jesse, about an apprenticeship. A couple of weeks later I signed on, and I have not looked back since. I've always been a hands-on person, ever since I was a little kid, so this job is definitely right down my alley.

Why do you think women should consider a career in welding?

I believe that many women should consider a job like mine if they enjoy being hands-on and getting down and dirty. Unfortunately, I only know of one other female boilermaker that I met through TAFE.

However, I am confident that I will start to see more females become involved in this male dominated industry in the very near future.

Do you have any advice for women considering a career in welding?

If you are a female getting involved in the welding trade, or any trade at all, give it your all, have fun and don't worry about what anyone else thinks. There are a small number of people that don't necessarily like us females being involved in the trade, but there is a larger number of males that support and push us females to do our best.

I have always gotten along a bit better with males than I do with females, which has really helped, because I feel very comfortable in my working environment.

I get huge amounts of support from my whole team and it is truly inspiring to be able to grow in an environment that is not necessarily a path that many females would normally take.

Have you found working in a traditionally male-dominated industry difficult?

Unfortunately, no matter where you go, more times than not, there is going to be someone who doesn't believe the path you're taking is the right one because you're a female. That is when you need to stand up for yourself and what you believe in and just tell them, 'this is what I want to do, just like you, and there isn't anything that makes us different'. Don't let anyone tell you what you can and can't do, and most certainly do not let anyone dim your light.

What is the most interesting project you've worked on?

All of the projects that I work on range from many different areas, so there isn't necessarily one that makes the other more interesting, because they are all unique. Some are easy, some are challenging, but in the end seeing the final result is very rewarding. To be able to stand back and see what you have created is one of the best and most rewarding parts of the trade.

Who has inspired you professionally?

In a professional context, everyone in the trade has inspired me during my journey so far in a very



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different way. Every tradesperson has their own way of doing things. While learning and watching other trades, there are several people who inspire me to want to better my work, and better myself as a tradesperson.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge for the welding industry?

I don't believe our industry has many challenges, with the exception of trying to get more females involved. In fact, I believe one of the biggest opportunities that the welding industry can foster would be to take on more females in the trade. We have more finesse and are cleaner, and we bring a different type of energy into the workforce, and it seems that we get more opportunities than some other males in the trade too.

Overall, if you see yourself in a trade, then give yourself a go. Don't hold yourself back, because at the end of the day you are your own worst critic, and there is no person that can tell you what you can and can't do.

Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-17/female-boiler-maker-breaking-the-norm-in-the-kimberley/12433422>



To stay up-to-date with Gulland's progress on becoming a boilermaker, follow her on Instagram @_boilerchick_