

Alex David

From the Solomon Islands. Currently living in Fiji (travelling between the 2 countries)

Tell us about yourself

I have run an electrical business called Powerit since 2006 dealing with Electrical, Solar and Refrigeration services. I am also doing a Bachelor (honours) in Electrical Engineering. Because as running a business I feel that I should kept up to date on all things that are happening in the industry. A business In the Solomon Islands and Fiji must be an allrounder as nothing is specialised. So to do this I want to be on top of everything.

How did you get the scholarship from Skillbuild?

I went on the Skilbuild website and emailed them to ask if they could help me with a tender that I was thinking of going for in the Solomon Islands. I communicated with Bill Gammon and he was very helpful. Unfortunately, we didn't submit the tender as we were too busy with other work. Bill then asked me to come to Australia and do his Grid tie training course as a part of their scholarship program. I thought if I can get a qualification I will be able to get more Solar work. I had done a lot of Solar work, but I cannot sign off on the final job. There is no regulation here, so it gets a bit dangerous. So, I just wanted to learn how to do the right thing.

What is the Solar industry like in the Solomon Islands and Fiji?

There is only grid tie in the cities, a lot of the island is remote and off grid. There is no regulation, so anyone can get involved. I think this is dangerous as electricity is dangerous. In the Solomon Islands we just put as many panels as we can fit on the site. So, most of the time we just buy the panels and install. The process is the "more panels the more power". So, I thought if I can do some training and get an accreditation I can do the right thing.

The Skillbuild Training course.

I really enjoyed the 4 days. I met with other tradespeople, they were like my mates and I learnt from them as well. It is different here In Australia, but we are all using the same power that is generated from the sun. The course taught me that the concept of "more panels the more power" is not true. I learnt how to calculate energy in different ways. This knowledge makes me be more efficient. You must look at the system by site angles and temperature so often less is more. So, my customers will now be spending less and getting a better system, and that is what I want. It is just good practice. For example, a 5kW system should be worked out by the right number of panels and the right inverter. It makes perfect sense.

The Trainers

They were excellent. Firstly, we had a trainer who was from the Energy sector. He runs his own business and was so knowledgeable and approachable. Then we had an Engineer Diggaj Regmi (*more on him here link to the Diggaj story*) He taught us how to design a system. He was very good, and he explained everything very clearly and had great calculations. Then there was Bill. He has a lot of character, he's like a father figure. He has done so much and was always positive in his conversation.

The technology is so far advanced in Australia compared to where I come from so I felt out of it. He lifted my moral and made me believe I can do it.

Future plans?

I will apply for the accreditation with the Clean Energy Council of Australia as soon as I get my certificate from Skillbuild. Then I will use this experience and accreditation back in the Solomon Islands. We will be working on a “Solar fridges” project throughout the islands. I will use the training I received from the course to instruct my staff to do things the right way.

What did you get from the course?

I not only got a great understanding of the calculations needed for a good system I have learnt how to do things the right way. Back home this will put me ahead of everyone else. At home there are some Australian companies who come over to do systems, but they leave after the work is done. Now I will be one of the only local companies that have a full Australian recognised accreditation. I will lead the industry in professionalism. People will trust that we will do things efficiently, correctly and safely.

Footnote – Alex will be returning to Australia to complete a Stand Alone Power Systems Course with Skillbuild.