



An interview with Aidan Ward

Making a difference at CPC2017

Aidan Ward may be just 24, but his plumbing career has already reached great heights. After being selected to fly to remote Indonesia to represent Team Australia in Community Plumbing Challenge 2017, the young plumber has proven himself in more ways than one. We caught up with him in between stormwater repairs working for his employer Laser Plumbing Sale.

What made you apply for Community Plumbing Challenge 2017?

I applied for the Community Plumbing Challenge through work. [Master Plumbers Board Member and Director of Laser Plumbing Sale] Daniel Smolenaars told me about the opportunity, putting me in touch with Greg Tink from PICAC. I said I'd like to put my name forward. I sent a few emails explaining why. Then I was asked to be part of the team.

Tell us more about the project itself...

The job was set over two separate stages, design week, which was held last July and the Building and Construction stage, which was held last November.

We were working in a remote village called Cicau in West Java, about 50kms east of Jakarta. The aim of the project was to provide a new sanitation structure for the local school. I was part of Team Australia, but there were teams participating from all over the world. All teams worked really well together and there was a great mix of people, which made for strong banter.

What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?

My attitude was always to take it as it comes and solve the problems with common sense.

It soon became apparent that tools and fittings were thin on the ground. We had makeshift picks and the like, but at design stage, all I had was a tape measure and a spirit level. Luckily, that's all I needed.

For the construction stage I had a couple of my own shifters, drills and a shovel. We made do with the bare necessities. We had to use a string line as there were no lasers, and a tape to measure down. It was very old school, reminding me of when we first learned the tricks of the trade at trade school, and working with older colleagues onsite.

What did you learn?

I quickly learned that in this situation, what would have been the right answer in Australia often wasn't the right answer in Indonesia. Installing a corona toilet and bathroom tiles may well be the standard for residential projects in Australia, but for both practical and cultural reasons, were not suitable solutions for the issues we were facing here. At first glance we hadn't considered that the locals don't have money for toilet paper or the means to support a traditional western flushing toilet, with its running repairs. Through religion and belief, practicality and habit, the squat toilet is still the preferred solution in rural Indonesia.

Did you feel like you made a difference?

This program raised awareness to the importance of clean sanitation, which in my opinion is a basic human right. I have seen, experienced and contributed to how plumbing can save lives, and feel very proud of this fact.

What advice would you give those thinking of giving CPC a go?

Just go for it. You've got nothing to lose and would be crazy not to chuck yourself off the high dive into the deep end. If you are successful, it's crucial to go in with an open mind and take every challenge as it comes. I wouldn't have changed my experience for anything.

What does the future hold for Aidan Ward?

I'm making the most of being an apprentice, learning as much as I can through the mentorship of Laser Plumbing Sale. CPC2017 has certainly given me a taste for international work, and I would be keen to try some more at some stage. Also, I have always lived and worked in rural areas. I could be tempted to move towards the city in the future and try more urban plumbing projects for a change.

Aidan Ward is currently employed as an apprentice with Laser Plumbing Sale. He left school at 17, and met the Foreman of Laser Plumbing at a wedding, which led to an interview and eventually, full time work and a chance to build his career. He's nearing the end of his third year of employment with Laser Plumbing and specialises in maintenance plumbing.