

Training and technology

The Centre for Appropriate Technology has long recognised that any new technology provided in remote areas without appropriate training rarely improves access to services. Renewable Energy (RE) systems are no exception to this rule.

Accordingly, Bushlight's approach has always included a strong focus on training. Our current training programs include:

- **Level one** training offered to community residents living with a Bushlight RE system or a system installed by another service provider (more information below);
- **Level two** service provider training to assist Essential Service Officers understand how RE systems work and how to maintain them; and
- **Level three** training for electrical contractors providing up to date information on how to properly service remote RE systems.



Phyllis Batumbil from Mata Mata provided 'level one' training in the local language of Yolgnu Matha to residents of the nearby community of Mapuru.

Training and upgrades to pre-existing solar systems



Ronnie and Jennifer Wilson at RB River are thrilled their solar power system can now meet the community's needs.

Since 2008, Bushlight has been servicing and upgrading a number of renewable energy systems installed by other service providers with the aim of improving access to reliable energy services for residents and maximising system life. Some of these systems require only basic, ongoing maintenance while others need substantial work to ensure they are able to meet residents' energy needs.

Upgrades generally involve significant investment in new hardware – battery banks, inverters,

solar panels and the like. But the Bushlight upgrades program isn't just about engaging contractors and writing out a purchase order for new parts – perhaps the most important part of the process is the training which Bushlight provides to residents. Bushlight's training package was initially trialled in homelands close to Alice Springs and has now been successfully delivered to communities in the Centre and Top End of the Northern Territory as well as in north Queensland and north Western Australia.

In recognition of the critical role that training plays in meeting our objectives Bushlight has created a new position dedicated to this work. We are excited to welcome Wayne Barbour to the Community Engagement Support team as our Training Co-ordinator. Wayne has many years experience working as a trainer across the NT and will be working to consolidate Bushlight's training resources and co-ordinate the various level of training we offer.

A look at training in the Kimberley

RB River is a homeland 170 kilometres south east of Kununurra, currently being used as a training and support centre for at risk young people.

After carrying out Community Energy Planning to determine the community's current and future activities and their energy requirements, Bushlight upgraded the RE system. The upgrade involved installing a new inverter, a new regulator, a new battery bank and 25 new panels.

The training covered:

- Basic system start-up and emergency shut down;
- When to run the generator;
- Basic system maintenance; and
- How to choose energy efficient household appliances.

After Jennifer at RB River participated in Bushlight's training she took her electric kettle and frypan into town to give to family – 'now I understand what appliances are good for solar' she said.

Ronnie has many years experience servicing and maintaining diesel generators and was excited to learn about how to look after the solar too. He commented 'now I know to go over and check the inverter to see if we need to start up the generator to charge the batteries...we're saving \$600 a week on diesel now the system's running properly!'

In addition to these tangible benefits, providing training strengthens Bushlight's relationships with communities and is one way that we can ensure good communication remains central to our model of service delivery.



Ronnie practices checking whether the batteries are fully charged at RB River.

Bushlight welcomes a new Group Manager

Bushlight is pleased to welcome Leslie Heath to the position of Group Manager. Leslie has a wealth of experience working for community organisations and non-government organisations and was most recently worked managing the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service on Christmas Island. Bushlight looks forward to working with Leslie to continue to provide high quality and appropriate services to residents of Indigenous homelands.



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