

## **Practical action to expand the female talent pool**

*Four women taking practical, positive action to expand the female talent pool have been applauded by the National Association of Women in Construction at recent awards in NSW and Victoria.*

In New South Wales, Rodanthe-Marie Butler was presented with the Multiplex Scholarship for Future Leaders for her hard work encouraging young women to embrace careers in construction.

At just 23, Butler certainly has an ambitious agenda. While balancing a Bachelor of Construction and full-time work with Multiplex, Butler observed the lack of female role models and mentors at a high school and university level – so she set out to become one herself.

Now, while managing a busy schedule as a cost planner, and tutoring students at the University of Technology Sydney, Butler is also a mentor and motivator to a number of high school students.

“It’s important to spark interest in our industry while girls are still at high school,” she says.

“But we also need more female role models for young women at university. Just two of my lecturers were female – and I think these role models play an important part in inspiring young women to think ‘I can do that’.”

As Chair of NAWIC’s Success Series, Butler is also responsible for delivering bi-monthly events which provide professional development and networking for women throughout the industry. And her work with the Australian Institute of Quantity Surveyors’ YQS committee is helping university students and graduates get a foothold on the career ladder.

“Being one of just a few women who graduated in construction in my year, I understand the importance of creating a support network. The exchange of experience is vital – and I’m determined to do my bit to create a network of mentors for other young women,” Butler says.

In Victoria, Lavanya Kanagaratnam was presented with NAWIC’s Young Achiever Award.

Holding the unique distinction of being Multiplex’s first female site supervisor in Victoria, Kanagaratnam has been instrumental in the delivery of several major residential and university projects both in Melbourne and overseas.

Kanagaratnam’s career achievements have taken “an immense amount of hard work and dedication”, and she says it demanded not only self-belief but “a willingness to learn and be open to ideas from my mentors and really taking charge of the type of supervisor I wanted to be”.

She encourages other women to embrace the opportunities of a dynamic and fast-paced industry.

“It is an exciting industry that allows people to make a difference to modern society. Our buildings affect the environment, change the socio economic status of an area and employment opportunities. Having a hand in that is something really special,” Kanagaratnam adds.

Multiplex project coordinators Danielle Savio and Justine Hadj were presented with NAWIC’s Crystal Vision award for developing GAZELLA, an independent blog offering insights into inspiring women within the built environment industry.

While working on the construction of the Melbourne School of Design, the pair were keen to learn more about the strategies women use to build meaningful and successful careers in construction. When they couldn’t find what they were looking for, Savio and Hadj decided to create a forum themselves.

GAZELLA is a platform for women to not only express their opinions and seek advice, but to share their secrets to navigating a male-dominated work environment, climbing the leadership ladder and balancing work with a busy life outside the construction world.

“Our blog’s tone is one of positivity, collaboration and inclusivity. We recognise that stories are an effective way to share learnings among the community of women in the built environment,” Hadj says.

GAZELLA’s interviewees span the ranks from graduates to CEOs, and its readership is just as diverse.

“I often receive feedback from men who read the blog, who really applaud the qualities that we try to convey in the women we interview – and that they hope their daughters can have the same passion and determination,” Savio explains.

“I think what sticks with people are the anecdotes about experiences and issues and how they were overcome. And that’s why stories are so powerful,” Savio concludes.