

Attracting needed talent to the Highlands

By Di Stanley

A childcare educator by day, at night Kim Lamb's got stars in her eyes, spellbound by the lack of light pollution in the bush that gives her unobstructed views of the magnificent Milky Way.

Plumber Brett Jenkins has quickly settled into small town living at Capella with his partner and two young daughters, relishing the warm spring days after leaving the chilly climes of Tasmania for life on the mainland.

Kim and Brett are two of the stars of short films for the Central Highlands Development Corporation's talent attraction strategy, *Make the Smart Move*, launched this week, to tackle the region's labour shortage.

The project, created by the CHDC and marketing agency NeonLogic, aims to attract and retain more skilled and unskilled workers to the region.

"The research, including this year's Central Highlands Business Survey, indicates time and time again that recruiting and retaining labour is a significant constraint to growth for local businesses," CHDC chief executive Peter Dowling said.

"Tackling that has countless potential flow-on effects - from longer retail trading hours to reduced appointment waiting times - and ultimately secures the long-term prosperity and liveability of our region."

The campaign will feature extensive online and outdoor media advertising for two months and include tools on chdc.com.au to help local business and industry build their own pipeline of candidates.

"It's essential that local employers embrace this campaign," Mr Dowling says.

"The more brand awareness we can build, the more effective our message will be."

Kim was lured away from the Gold Coast's Glitter Strip by a friend and urged to relocate to the Central Highlands three years ago.

It's been a winning move.

Kim is a lead educator in the nursery room at the First5Years childcare facility in Emerald and



One of the stars of the Central Highlands Development Corporation's talent attraction campaign is council sewer and water network supervisor Brett Jenkins who was at this week's launch with daughter Bridie. (Supplied)

is studying her diploma in early years education and a Bachelor of Psychology.

She is also a keen astrophotographer.

"I originally moved here as I had a friend that lived here, and I just fell in love with the place," she said.

"I've now met my partner and we're settling in and thinking about starting a family here and just really love the fact that it's a very friendly place and very laid back, and it's so much better than the Gold Coast.

"I love the stars and being a photographer, there's nowhere better than the Central Highlands because there is minimal to no light pollution out here."

"Moving out solidified that I am a country girl at heart."

Kim said she was proud to be part of the *Make the Smart Move* campaign.

"I think it's a really good campaign that they're doing," she said.

"It's very relevant to the needs, especially in the different sectors they're showcasing and it's definitely appealing to those that are probably in the city and are looking for a change but don't know how to get out of the rat race.

"It's definitely something that is going to engage and entice people, even if it's just a holiday, but it's definitely going to prompt them to do more investigation and see what jobs are on offer."

Brett is a sewer and water network supervisor at the Central Highlands council who reckons coming to live and work in the Central Highlands was the best decision for his young family, partner Meghan and daughters Adelyn, four, and wriggly one-year-old Bridie.

"We love it out at Capella," Brett said.

"It's a really family friendly community, like everyone welcomed us with open arms when we got here.

"We've got an abundance of playgrounds in Clermont, Capella and Emerald for the kids and we like to get out and about.

"On the weekends, we go out to Clermont, out to the dam so we can take the dog for a swim and we've done a mine tour at the Gemfields.

"At work, all the management has been really supportive and it's a really good atmosphere.

"The guys on the ground that are in my network crew, I couldn't fault anyone."

The *Make the Smart Move* theme was borne from extensive research, including local focus group sessions and online surveys.

"The common thread in all of the consultations has been that our region hits the mark when it comes to career, lifestyle and affordability," Mr Dowling said.

"*Make the Smart Move* encapsulates the message that the Central Highlands is the intelligent choice for people wanting rewarding work, an easy lifestyle and to be part of a safe and vibrant community.

"The main target audiences are workers in the early childhood education and construction sectors because if we can boost daycare availability and housing supply, that'll boost the region's appeal for other workers to move here."

The campaign is part of the Workforce Development and Accommodation Strategy, launched earlier this year to address the Central Highlands' labour, housing and lifestyle challenges.