

## Q Plumb & Gas

# Championing Women in Trades

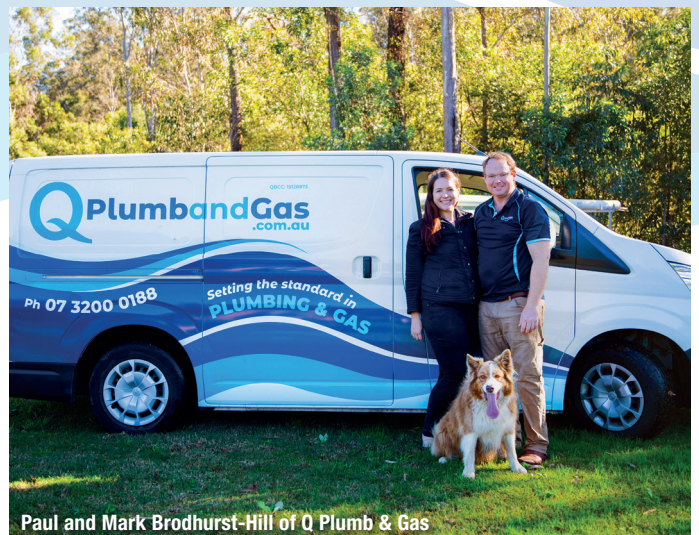


**At the heart of many plumbing and gas businesses are women who are leading the way—running businesses, managing finance and administration, and, increasingly, working on the tools.**

But the reality is women only make up about three percent of the construction and trades industry in Australia.

In 2021, research conducted by the Charles Sturt University identified that at every stage of their lives—from the moment they start school to when they begin evaluating their careers—girls are more likely to be pushed towards higher education than pursuing a trade. In fact, Dr. Donna Bridges, senior lecturer in sociology in the Charles Sturt University School of Humanities and Social Sciences, says that the industry has been having a difficult time not just attracting women to the construction and building industry, but even retaining those who are already in it.

Q Plumb & Gas may be a small family-owned business, but they are doing their best to create better opportunities for women in the trades. MPAQ was fortunate to have a chat with the ladies of Q Plumb & Gas to learn more about how they are doing things differently.



Paul and Mark Brodhurst-Hill of Q Plumb & Gas

### Paula Brodhurst-Hill: Co-owner

“A hot shower, working cooking appliances, and a functioning sewerage system are all aspects of a home whose importance is only realised in their absence,” says Paula Brodhurst-Hill about the crucial role of plumbing and gas businesses in safeguarding the health and safety of Queenslanders.

Paula is the co-owner of Q Plumb and Gas, a plumbing and gas company started by her husband, Mark Brodhurst-Hill, in 2006. In recent years, Q Plumb and Gas has grown where it matters, establishing a solid customer base of homeowners, property managers, and businesses in the Ipswich, Logan, and Brisbane South areas. They provide plumbing and gas fitting services at the highest standard, with reliable 24/7 and emergency services when it’s needed the most.

There is a lot to credit to Paula, who brought her years of expertise in marketing and communications to the table. She joined the family business in 2016 to lend support to her husband, and since then, business growth and turnover has more than doubled.

“I originally wasn’t overly involved in the business until 2016 when we realised that we worked better as a team,” said Paula. “On the day to day, I focus on working on the business, developing relationships with clients, recruiting staff, and ensuring the accounts are up to date and the business profitable. My marketing and communications background helps me develop a deeper understanding of our customers’ needs and find creative ways to communicate with them.”

Paula’s influence in the plumbing and gas space extends past the family business, as she also won the 2022 Andrea Vogler Women in Business Award at the Plumbing and Gas Industry Awards. She is a very active member of the Women’s Plumbing Alliance and other business groups in her area, where she represents and champions plumbing as a highly skilled profession.

Maybe it’s Paula’s influence that gives Q Plumb that extra warmth, drawing in more clients and keeping the ones they already have, but it’s undeniable that there is magic behind the husband-and-wife tandem who has been running and growing the business to new heights.

### Jasmine – Qualified Plumber; Summer – 1st Year Apprentice

While many women get involved in plumbing and gas on the business side, the same cannot be said for women representation on the tools. Paula believes that what makes Q Plumb a true champion of women empowerment is the fact that every single member of their team—men and women equally—support each other.

“I think it’s important not only that women support female participation in the industry, but men do as well. The preconceptions that some in the trades have about female tradespeople are unfounded. In fact, the women we employ have had no issues at all keeping up with their male counterparts and often bring a different approach that benefits the customers. Our female employees deliver what every employer would want: reliability, quality, and professionalism,” says Paula.

Jasmine Turnbull and Summer Lane, the two members of Q Plumb who are on the tools, certainly embody those qualities.

Jasmine shares that it was a video of a fellow female plumber in Melbourne who got her to consider joining the trade. She spent a good six months thinking about whether to pursue plumbing and another six months trying to apply for apprenticeships before completing her apprenticeship. Last year she joined Q Plumb, who are now helping her work towards her gas and restricted electrical licenses.

“I always knew I wanted a more hands-on job,” says Jasmine. “Working with Q Plumb and Gas has been such a positive experience for me. Not only do they provide a great working environment with a good work-life balance, but I really admire how efficiently they run their company.”

Summer, on the other hand, has always heard stories from her classmates and teachers about the trades. After doing her work experience with a plumber, she decided to get into TAFE to continue her education. Not long after that, Paula and Mark invited her to join the company.

“Apart from the early morning start, Q Plumb has made the transition into the trade a simple and easy one,” Summer says. “Working with them is absolutely fantastic. They have supported me as a female apprentice by not treating me any differently from the blokes and giving me the same opportunities.”

### A Progressive Future for the Trades

Q Plumb has definitely created a supportive environment that lets everyone in their team—no matter their gender—thrive in what they do. The ladies of Q Plumb agree that there can still be challenges, but things are changing and a lot of decision-makers and members of the plumbing and gas industry are doing their best to move the industry forward into a more progressive and sustainable future.

“Even in just five years, I’ve seen the industry shift,” says Jasmine. “And for every person I’ve had tell me they wouldn’t hire me for being a female, I’ve had another two tell me they would hire a female apprentice or tradie. There will always be someone who has something negative to say, so my best advice is to ignore it and just do whatever makes you happy.”

At the moment, four out of the 10 people in their team are female, both off and on the tools. Paula says: “Ideally, we would love to work towards 50% of our staff being female. We believe that a higher participation of women in plumbing will only improve some of the challenges the industry is facing. Our focus is to ensure we are providing a supportive and safe environment where women are made to feel welcome.”

Female empowerment is just one part of the large spectrum that the plumbing and gas industry can work towards improving. Many in the industry are fighting for better wages, better business owner rights, better government support, better incentives to train apprentices. But when we make one thing better, that just gives us more momentum to keep moving forward and continue fixing the other problems. Small strides from businesses such as Q Plumb and Gas ripple and create waves of change towards a progressive future for the trades.



Paula Brodhurst-Hill, business manager



Jasmine Turnbull, qualified plumber



Summer Lane, 1st year apprentice

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