In any field, it is important that healthy working relationships are built and maintained. Not just with our work colleagues, but also the clients and contractors that we work with. Contracts can run smoother as a result, defects can be addressed more efficiently, both parties can achieve their goals, the list can go on and on. In metropolitan areas, organisations can be inundated by clients and contractors. If these relationships go sour, it is easier to move on to the next client or contractor. Unfortunately, this isn’t quite the case for most rural areas, where the majority of projects come from a handful of local clients, with a low number of contractors that tender for projects. Hence why it is essential that our working relationships between clients and contractors is maintained.

At the company I work for, our clients are generally local councils that have collaborated with us since 1945. If an employee was to damage these relationships, the company would struggle to maintain its high reputation. It is through these quality long term relationships that we, as engineers, can provide and deliver
the best for our communities. While workload varies from various clients, we maintain strong relationships by staying true to our values and use these opportunities to further demonstrate our capabilities. Which ultimately not only helps deliver the facilities the community deserve, but also allows us to create and build our relationships with local contractors.

Due to the locality of many rural jobs, non-local tenderers struggle to achieve inviting prices due to transportation of equipment, accommodation and travel costs. Due to this and among other factors, jobs are generally awarded to local contractors. These local contractors are not just contractors, they are also our neighbours and part of our community. They are the locals we see at football games, the pub, the supermarket, just about anywhere. To ensure our working relationships are beneficial, it is not about avoiding contractors outside of work hours. It’s about knowing where your working relationship stops and your private community relationship begins.

Building a rapport with contractors in a rural community can ensure that projects run smoothly and are a collaborative team effort between all stakeholders. A personal example is one of my first projects I completed as an engineer in Barcaldine. One day driving down an isolated road I came across an old Border Collie all alone, I thought nothing of picking him up and dropping him to the closest pound to find his owner. As it turns out, the dog I picked up belonged to the family of a contractor I was currently working with. They were so grateful that I stopped to help the dog, that it transitioned our standard working relationship into a relationship built on mutual respect that benefitted all parties. Which ultimately contributed to a smooth sailing project.

At the end of the day, relationships can be difficult and hard work, but the rewards can make life easier and more enjoyable for all involved. Approaching relationships with a positive attitude has helped develop my love for engineering in a rural community. Being able to see the results of my hard work and sharing this with our clients and contractors make for a rewarding experience that help maintain the local community.