



Will to work: Young apprentice Jono Adrian on the job at Argyle diamond mine in the Kimberley.

Picture: Sharon Smith

Rio drives indigenous workforce boom

JESSICA STRUTT

Apprentice mechanic Jono Adrian reckons anybody who really wants a job in the Kimberley can get one.

The 22-year-old, who works at Rio Tinto's Argyle diamond mine, is just one of the many young indigenous people employed on the site, which is about 120km from the nearest settlement, Kununurra.

While it may be most famous for its signature pink diamonds, the mine is also leading the way with its commitment to training and

employment of local Aboriginals. More than 25 per cent of the mine's 500-strong workforce are indigenous.

A participation agreement with traditional owners, signed in 2004, sets a target of 80 per cent local employment, 50 per cent of which it strives to ensure is Aboriginal.

Electrical apprentice Dylan Nott, 21, said he had been saving his earnings because he hoped to travel overseas.

He said the best thing that ever happened to him was going away for schooling in Perth because it gave

him the opportunity to meet people from outside his hometown of Kununurra. Finishing Year 12 helped him secure his dream job at the diamond mine.

"A lot of people don't leave Kununurra, so it's kind of good being able to get away because it made me see there's more to life than drinking and fighting and violence," Mr Nott said. "I love my job."

Rio Tinto hopes to have a new underground mine operating below the existing open pit by 2013.