



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Geelong Big-Hearted Employer Hailed a Hero**

**A Geelong company that bent over backwards to employ, train and communicate with a deaf worker has been hailed as a national employment hero.**

FUSO Geelong, in partnership with MatchWorks, has been named the winner of the inaugural Innovation in Disability – Team Award at the prestigious NESA National Employment Awards for Excellence at a gala dinner in Melbourne last night.

NESA (National Employment Services Association) is the peak body for the Australian employment and related services industry.

When 19-year-old deaf job seeker Chris Linahan went to MatchWorks Geelong to help him realise his dream of becoming a Diesel Mechanic, this employment services provider realised that they needed a custom approach. To make their task more challenging Chris does not lip read, solely communicating via AUSLAN. MatchWorks' answer was to form a special team to make Chris' dream come true.

They then turned to FUSO Geelong Dealer Principal, Richard Furnari. A philanthropist through and through, Richard embraced the challenge. He has since provided AUSLAN training for Chris' workmates, made workshop modifications so Chris does not have to hear vehicles moving to be safe, and launched a world-first app called eCheck which allows Chris to complete jobs and communicate with customers. Chris now services and test drives trucks, communicates freely and has accepted FUSO Geelong's offer for an apprenticeship.

eCheck is proving popular. Mr Furnari said "We developed the software ourselves and we're rolling it out to fleet companies, other local workshops, and also to the Victorian Government to service their front-line fire response units, including all fire trucks. From humble beginnings, this app has the potential to assist businesses across the globe employ more deaf people."

Host of the awards, National Employment Services Association (NESA) CEO, Sally Sinclair, said "This award is a great tribute to FUSO Geelong and MatchWorks, and shows how employers can totally change people's lives and improve opportunities for people with a disability when they invest the time to create truly inclusive workplaces.

"The employment and related services industry in Australia is all about helping people into sustained employment, and these Awards truly acknowledge the direct and lasting impact that employment service providers like MatchWorks have on people's lives," she said..

Four other awards were also announced:

- Australian Achiever of the Year, which recognises a job seeker who has overcome extraordinary disadvantage to embrace employment, was won by 22-year-old Tom McGann from Mornington (VIC).
- National Champion Employer of the Year, which recognises organisations that give disadvantaged Australians a fair go, was won by Sodexo, a services company that supports mining operations in Western Australia.
- National Employment Consultant of the Year recognises professionals who work to find jobs for disadvantaged Australians. It was won by Penelope Weatherall from Open Minds in Ipswich (QLD).
- The inaugural Excellence in Indigenous Employment Award honours employment services professionals and organisations who find work for indigenous Australians. It was won by Nicole Findlay from WISE Employment in Melbourne.

The NESAs National Employment Services Awards for Excellence are now in their 12<sup>th</sup> year.

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**Media:**

**Interviews with FUSO or Chris – Lachlan Cowlshaw, MatchWorks, (0407 141 271)**

**NESA comments – Carole Gregson, Business Manager, NESA (0411 205 717)**

**General award enquiries - Liz Rivers, Awards Absolute [convenors] (07 5446 4299)**