



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Tuesday 2 AUGUST 2016**

### **Ipswich Employment Hero Wins National Award**

**An Ipswich worker who invests both her working week and leisure time helping Ipswich locals overcome the barriers to employment has been hailed as a national employment hero.**

Penelope Weatherall, who works for Open Minds (a CoAct network member), was announced last night as the winner of the National Employment Consultant of the Year award at the prestigious NESA National Employment Awards for Excellence at a gala dinner in Melbourne.

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

As a Senior Employment Consultant, Penelope has become renowned for developing “outside the box” strategies that are proving successful in helping even the most disadvantaged job seekers find employment.

Working in a region with high youth unemployment and groups of highly disadvantaged groups might make some people feel disheartened. Not Penelope! She said “I really enjoy seeing people progress (towards getting a sustainable job), and knowing that I’m making a difference in their lives is the greatest reward. I go to work every day with the knowledge that I am helping empower people. That is a wonderful feeling!”

In fact, helping people is the fuel that drives Penelope’s life.

At the end of the working week she volunteers for numerous organisations, including the Salvation Army assists pre-release prisoners to prepare for life outside prison, and on Sundays she cooks for homeless people as part of a community program called Foot Prints in the Path.

Host of the awards, National Employment Services Association (NESA) CEO, Sally Sinclair, said “More than 20,000 employment consultants work across Australia, helping job seekers reap the economic, health and social benefits of workforce participation, so it’s a very significant achievement for Penelope to be named as the winner.

“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 consultants like Penelope 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.
- 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 new Innovation in Disability – Team Award, which recognises employment service providers and employment organisations who have worked together to assist people with a disability, was won by FUSO Geelong and MatchWorks.

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

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**Media:**

**Interviews with Penelope – through CoAct’s Jessica Reeve (0478 165 812)**

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

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