

MEDIA RELEASE

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Short changed: employment expert Sally Sinclair of NESAsays the challenges for women in the workforce can still be daunting

The International Women’s Day motto of #choosetochallenge seems perfectly pitched at the workforce where women face greater casualisation, less superannuation and the lion’s share of carer roles that hinder full-time employment. Employment expert and CEO of National Employment Services Association (NESAs), Sally Sinclair, says more needs to be done for women in the workforce

Cathrine had just left a violent partner when she applied to ETC employment services for the chance to rebuild her finances, and in turn her confidence and her independence.

“I was in a very abusive relationship and it took me a long time to seek help; every dollar was accounted for and I had no financial freedom,” Cathrine says. “ETC gave me so many opportunities and helped me believe in myself again, and that I deserved more and now I am in a great place and I really love my job.”

With the assistance of ETC, Cathrine secured employment as a baker’s assistant working hard to become financially independent. It was a rocky road and she did return briefly to her abusive partner but she moved from Queensland to Port Macquarie in NSW to start over. The distance from her partner allowed her to focus on her health and the health of her four kids and she is now firmly on her feet and she owns her own home and car for the first time.

“Working again has helped with my self esteem and I am doing a lot better than I have ever been,” Cathrine says.

Sally Sinclair, CEO of National Employment Services Association, says that Cathrine’s story is all too common. “Despite some clear advances over the decades, women are still at a disadvantage in the workplace,” Sinclair says. “For every female CEO there are hundreds of women who are not on par with their male colleagues. Women often hold more casual roles and the recent coronavirus significantly increased the burden of unpaid care, which is disproportionately carried by women.”

Getting back on their feet

Rebecca has been unemployed for over seven years due to having a child with behavioural issues. Taking the role of full-time carer meant finding work was hard for her and it saw her living with her mother in an over 50s resort.

“The majority of carer roles tend to fall to women, though every situation is different,” Rebecca says. “I was applying for cleaning jobs but I was supported to do something different with Community Solutions employment services and took a job at Koppers wood products.”

Since Rebecca commenced employment at Koppers in the middle of January she has been promoted from a labourer to an operator and her confidence has soared and she can now see a better future for herself and her son.

“For many women, finding the right job is the first step in getting back on their feet,” says Sally Sinclair. “Whether it is having children, caring for elderly parents or being in an abusive situation women face a lot of disruption to their work and careers – and if we can help them overcome that we get closer to the idea of equality in the workplace and society as a whole.

“In Europe there are coordinated strategies for women’s transition back into the workforce and something similar is needed here in Australia,” Sinclair says. “We need more support services for those who have been disadvantaged by bad relationships or by the pandemic and make sure they have access to some key reskilling to face with new challenges.

“International Women’s Day is a time of celebration but it is also time to be candid about the challenges that we face. Post-COVID, the risk of a long-term unemployment crisis is very real and could be with us for many years if additional action to support those disadvantaged in the labour market is not implemented,” says Sinclair. “Women are in a more precarious position than men when it comes to working and this requires a more nuanced response. We need to look not just at unemployment but underemployment, we must make sure we find jobs that people want to do. And we need to challenge the idea we have reached equality in the workplace, that the fight is won. It is not, but it can be with the right support.”

Available for comment

Sally Sinclair, CEO of NESA

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