

Media Release

Victorian woman with disability wins national award after overcoming severe discrimination to land dream job

Victorian woman Dane Eralp always dreamed of a big life. Born profoundly deaf and having English as a second language, the former job seeker has always found communication especially challenging.

Dane had a realistic outlook and didn't want to let her disability define or limit her. She was determined to reach her potential and show what a CALD person with a disability and English as a second language could achieve with positivity and strong support.

Dane's family returned to their homeland of Turkey in 1992 when she was six years old.

"My grandfather was diagnosed with cancer, he didn't have insurance and my mother, who was an only child, worked really hard to give him the emotional support he needed," she said.

"I was the only deaf person in school, so it was hard. I am not great at literacy. Communication is a challenge for me. I am not fluent in either English or Turkish."

Despite facing disadvantage throughout her school education, Dane was determined to follow her passion. She commenced studies to become a hairdresser and worked in a salon for 11 years.

She moved back to Australia and received a Disability Support Pension and started looking for work. With 11 years' experience, she thought she would find something. Yet no one would employ her, even after she completed a Certificate III in Hairdressing at Kangan Institute in Melbourne and spent two years at Vicdeaf learning Auslan.

She approached around 30 hair salons directly with no success, continuously being knocked back for her hearing impairment. Then with the help of her mother and a Disability Employment Services Consultant from Matchworks who communicated with her in Turkish, she found a job at a local salon Endless Hair in Essendon.

She is thriving - working in a salon that supports her needs. Salon Director of Endless Hair, Eddie, has Turkish heritage and is fluent. He regularly trains hairdressers and was open to hiring someone with a disability.

Now Dane has won the National Employment Services Association (NESAs) Achiever of the Year award for overcoming adversity to land the job of her dreams.

“It was challenging enough for her to work in open employment and put her hairdressing skills to good use. She needed support so she could communicate with employers and clients in the hair salon... Dane pushed and worked through all of this,” MatchWorks Post-Placement Support Consultant, Katherine Vella says.

CEO of NESAs Sally Sinclair says stories like Dane’s highlight the ongoing struggle people with a disability have in gaining employment in Australia.

She says Dane’s story is inspirational and shows how engaging with employment service providers as eager advocates can make all the difference.

Minister for Social Services Amanda Rishworth met all the finalists at the ceremony and listened to their stories of achieving and providing meaningful employment before presenting the award to Dane.

“I spoke to Dane and her family earlier and was impressed at her tenacity in following her dreams in spite of the barriers that she faced.

I hope that Dane’s story will lift the expectations of employers. With so many business crying out for skilled workers there is no better time than now to hire someone living with a disability.

The Albanese Government is committed to creating a better life for Australians with disability. We want to make sure that more people like Dane can find the employment that they want and start their journeys into leadership positions.” Minister Rishworth said.

ENDS

About NESAs Awards for Excellence:

Presented by NESAs and Minister for Social Services Hon Amanda Rishworth - The award ceremony took place at Sydney’s Sofitel Wentworth on Wednesday October 5th to highlight the shining stars in the country’s employment services. The occasion also celebrates NESAs’ 25th year in leading the sector.

From individuals that have overcome adversity to thrive in employment, employers that have put inclusion at the forefront of their business models and employment services consultants going above and beyond - - the awards aim to highlight the commitment the employment services sector has made to improve individuals’, families’ and communities’ economic and social well-being through employment inclusion.



The awards are split into three categories – Achiever of the Year, Employment Consultant of the Year and Champion Employer of the Year.

CEO of NESAs Sally Sinclair says the awards are an opportunity for employment service providers to be acknowledged for their innovation and support in creating pathways between disadvantaged individuals and employers across the country.

Following the Government's recent Jobs and Skills Summit, the focus on getting more disadvantaged Australians into the workforce and creating more accessible and inclusive workplaces has never been more in the spotlight.