

Media Release

South Australian employer takes out national award for leading the way in inclusive hiring

South Australian employer **NF McDonnell & Sons** has taken out a national employment award for their commitment in hiring people with major barriers to employment.

Close to 30 percent of the Mount Gambier timber mills' 123 staff have offending history, live with a disability, suffer from mental health, homelessness or transport issues, have severe long term unemployment or are refugees.

Now **NF McDonnell & Sons** have won the National Employment Services Associations' Employer of the Year award, sponsored by Jobbank, for their commitment and flexibility in providing employment to disadvantaged Australians.

Over the last three years, the organisation has hired 107 people who suffer from barriers to employment.

The mill has worked closely to develop pathways for vulnerable Australians' to help them settle into employment at their organisation, including job tours and trials, working closely with job coaches, immense upskilling opportunities, breaking down language barriers and monthly meetings to address any arising barriers to employment for those involved.

The organisation has a strong interest in diversifying their workforce and a commitment to supporting refugee people sustain employment in their business. Humanitarian settlement in SA's Southeast over a number of years has seen the growth of a local Burmese community.

Craig, who currently works at **NF McDonnell & Sons**, suffered from major barriers to employment as a result of offending history, caring responsibilities for his children and a lack of transportation.

These were able to be addressed head-on by the employer to help with care and transport barriers, as well as being flexible in Craig's hours and changes in shifts to attend counselling and corrections appointments.

60-year-old Jim is also an employee, who suffered from complex mental health issues. He was trained to operate machinery that matched his abilities. After Jim suffered a mental health episode, the organisation maintained regular contact with him when off work and put in place

measures to support Jim back into the workplace, including offering flexible working hours/shifts to help him to maintain his mental health.

CEO of NESAs Sally Sinclair says **NF McDonnell & Sons** set the standard for what employers across Australia must consider rolling out to best support disadvantaged job seekers.

She says the success stories out of the organisation highlight how dedication and flexibility and getting rid of bias are key in finding top staff.

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 awards.

“These awards are an enormous step to changing the narrative for people with disabilities. They prove that putting inclusion first and hiring someone with a disability is not a charitable act, but makes good business sense.

“The Albanese Government is committed to creating a better life for Australians with disability. This includes working to support employers to understand and work with people with disability to create inclusive workplace cultures that allow people with disability to thrive.

“I congratulate for NF McDonnell & Sons for their commitment and for setting an example that I encourage other businesses to follow so we can start to open up more opportunities for people with disabilities. It’s particularly a proud moment for me as NF McDonnell & Sons are from my home state in SA, “ Minister Rishworth said.

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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.