



SOLO ACT

Natalie Needham-Kelly thinks women have to work harder to prove themselves in construction

HAPPY TO BE ONE OF A KIND IN A MAN'S WORLD

WHEN NATALIE NEEDHAM-KELLY PICKS up her tools each day, she carries an extra burden.

As one of the few female apprentices in the industry, the 19-year-old is determined to show gender is no obstacle to a career in construction.

"I definitely go a bit harder in my studies and in my work to outdo the other apprentices to show women are as good as the guys," she says.

For the second-year apprentice shop-fitter, starting a trade was a natural choice after finishing high school.

"Everyone in my family has a trade," she says adding that her stepsister plans to follow in Natalie's footsteps by training to become an electrician.

"It's a pretty steady job – the construction

industry is always going to be around and the money's pretty good," she says.

Natalie also considers construction a creative profession.

"I love standing back and looking at something I've finished and think 'wow I built that'."

As the only woman working on the tools at her workplace, Natalie has to sometimes concede that she can't do everything the blokes do.

"I try to work smart, rather than hard and use the palette jack a little more than the others. But I'm not afraid to ask for help if it is too heavy."

Experience has also made Natalie a firm supporter of the CFMEU and she urges fellow apprentices and trainees to make the commitment. "I think it is important to be part of the

union," she says. "It's handy to know I've got the back-up and that the union is there to explain my rights.

Natalie, who says she now has a brilliant employer, admits she learned the hard way.

She was forced to restart her apprenticeship in Sydney, after leaving a Brisbane job because of "inappropriate behaviour".

"When I got into my [first] apprenticeship I was told about the union and I never joined up. I had a very dodgy employer and I learned the hard way how important the union is."

Despite urging Natalie could not think of a downside of being a woman in a man's world.

On the upside however she points out that as one of a kind she gets her own toilet.

INITIATIVES AIMED AT KICKSTARTING CAREERS

AS PART OF ITS RESPONSE TO THE GLOBAL financial crisis, the Rudd Labor Government has introduced a range of initiatives to support apprentices.

The Building Workers Assistance Centre Australian Apprenticeships Centre and Employment Service (BWAC) has a longstanding and successful relationship with employers and apprentices.

It is a strong supporter and participant in the Australian apprenticeships system. Skilled tradespeople provide the foundations of our lifestyles.

These skilled tradespeople are the Australian apprentices of years gone by and the employers of the new breed of apprentices.

Among the initiatives announced by the

Federal Government that are currently available to eligible employers or apprentices are:

- Employer commencement incentives for standard commencement; standard recommendation; Securing Australia's Apprentices commencement bonus; the kickstart bonus;
- Employer completion incentives: standard completion; Securing Australia's Apprentices commencement bonus,
- The Tools For Your Trade payment (encompassing the previous Apprentice Wage Top Up; the Tools for Your Trade Voucher; and the Commonwealth Trade Learning Scholarship);
- The Living Away From Home Allowance;
- The Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support; and

- The Support for Adult Apprentices.

Further details of these initiatives are available on the **BWAC website** at www.bwacaac.org.au

Or you can call BWAC in Sydney on 9749 9488 and speak to either Walter Garcia or Sarah Leighton; or BWAC on the Central Coast on 4322 3376 and speak to Glenn Peters. If you want to arrange a sign up, please call Elizabeth Rivera on 9749 9488.

At BWAC we pride ourselves on our commitment to employers, employees and jobseekers and to making a positive impact on the current skills needs in Australian workplaces and the lives of the members of our community.

Please feel free to contact us with any issues relating to skilling and apprenticeships.