

Michaelia Cash:

Hi, I'm Senator Michaelia Cash, Minister for Employment Skills, Small and Family business. Welcome to National Skills Week 2020. And to this year's podcast series – Journeys to Success brought to you by SkillsOne. In this podcast series, you'll hear from a number of VET Alumni and Australian Training Awards winners. They will share with you interesting and varied journeys they've taken due to their vocational education and training. Our VET Alumni and Australian Training Awards winners come from all walks of life. They have inspirational stories to share about what prompted their learning decisions, their influences, their training and work journey, and why vocational education and training was the right choice for them. This podcast is a great way to learn about the success people have had in their careers and life. There was so much diversity and opportunity that a VET pathway can offer. So enjoy the podcast, be inspired and the best of luck to those who are starting on their VET journey. And if you want more information on where a vocational education and training pathway can take you visit the national careers Institute website at [nci.dese.gov.au](http://nci.dese.gov.au).

Anne- Host:

This episode is about Rebecca and Kathleen's experiences, in working in careers that would be traditionally identified as a male dominated occupation. I just have to say that both Rebecca and Kat hate that terminology. And so this podcast is talking about their experiences and their insights into it. Rebecca is the Western Australian trainee of the year, 2019. And she also then went on to be a finalist in the Australian Training Awards. She works in the construction and mining sector and did her traineeship as a crane driver. Kathleen or Kat is a 2018 Queensland trainee of the year. And she also went on to be a finalist at the Australian Training Awards. Kathleen was a mechanic and then started a traineeship as a telecommunications technician. They both speak of the perceptions versus reality of working in careers which have been identified as male dominated. They speak of their decision, and their journey, and their insights, and their personal opinions and how this has allowed them to realize the passion and their career choice. We finished up with some insights and some advice from them, for people who may be interested in going into this career area and also for the parents and for career advisors. So let's welcome Kathleen and Rebecca.

Anne- Host:

So welcome Rebecca and Kat, how are you today?

Rebecca:

Great thank you.

Kathleen:

I'm Good.

Anne- Host:

Great. That's fantastic. So thanks for joining us and that's great that we're going to have this conversation today, but I thought I might tell the listeners, first of all, what do we mean by a male dominated occupation? So the definition of a male dominated occupation is when there is less than 25% of workers, of a specific gender in that occupation. And I would say Rebecca and Kat in your areas, you're definitely working in an area where there's less than 25% of women working in it. Would I be right in saying that Kat, what about where you are working at the moment?

Kathleen:

I am a telecommunications technician

Anne- Host:

And Bec yourself, what about where do you working? What industry sector are you in?

Rebecca:

I'm a refinery operator in the alumina mining. I've been in regional WA.

Anne- Host:

Yeah. And is there lots of women working beside you in that occupation?

Rebecca:

My particular-

Kathleen:

No.

Rebecca:

Yeah. My particular company is one of the higher recruiters of women in the industry. They've won quite a few awards - Alcoa. So they're are brilliant in that sense. You asked me before when we were just chatting and you said, "Oh, how many women are in the area?" And I just couldn't really answer that because I don't go to work thinking, oh, there's only one chick in my team. I have no other women, but the men of equal value as employees and co-workers.

Anne- Host:

Okay. So what makes us to talk about working in what's referred to as a traditional male dominated occupation. In Australia the recent reports indicate that the figure of about 2 to 3% of women are working in these male-dominated trades areas. So you guys are really on the cutting edge of making change in the industry and in the trade. So congratulations. I just want to say that.

Rebecca:

Thank you.

Anne- Host:

So we want to, and most of them will be for you there's going be heaps more women up to you, but I think it's really important to acknowledge and explore the idea about perception versus reality of women working in these occupations. So what the conditions are like, what are the expectations, what do you guys see as a difference in these careers compared to others. And also just have a bit of an idea about some of the advice that you would actually give out.

Anne- Host:

So I thought we might explore that today. So get an idea, who are listening in. So it's people who are interested for themselves, or parents, or career advisors, or people in the industry and employers to sort

of say, well, this is a perception or this is reality of what are they actually like. Okay let's address some of those issues. I thought I'd start with you Rebecca, talking about your initial journey. Did you want to give us some information about yourself first. Did you go straight into this trade or what happened to you firstly?

Rebecca:

Well, I turned 40, I'm a mother of three children and I was working many, many hours. I was high stress, one day I was just under the pump and I said to my colleague, "I'm taking 20 minutes." I walked away from the desk and in 20 minutes I got back I had 17 missed phone calls, I had 20 instant messages on my screen and my landline had 25 missed phone calls. So it just goes to show you how much demand I was in. And I just sort of sat there and thought, what am I doing? What am I doing? Am I satisfied? Is this satisfying me? Is this making me feel complete?

Rebecca:

No, I felt like I was on the hamster wheel. So I actually was working in human resources labour hire and I approached one of my clients who was looking for entry level people to go into the mining industry and no tickets required. And I said, "Look, would you consider me?" And they went, "Well, no, because you're a head recruiter." Well, give me a go. Anyway, we had a bit of a joke and said, "Yeah, look, if that's what you want to do, do it. And I went out there with the attitude I'm just gonna get in there I don't want any fuss made remembering I had recruited a lot of these people. So at first and this considered a conspiracy theory and I was going in behind the scenes to watch what they're doing, which wasn't the case at all. So I was ready to go, that was it. I needed a career change at that stage and this particular opportunity came up.

Anne- Host:

Okay. All right. So I'll come back to what happens in a second, but for yourself Kat, talk to me about your journey to where you were. So before you were the telecommunications technician, what was your life before? You didn't go into this from school directly. So talk to me about that.

Kathleen:

Yeah. I grew up in a really small community and I had three brothers and a sister and we grew up on a bit of a farm there. So our whole weekends were spent tinkering with something. And so I grew up working on machinery, helping dad with machinery, always outside doing I suppose, those manly tasks around the place. And I went through school. I was told no matter what I had to finish grade 12, which is really important now looking back and I went to a school where if you weren't going for an OP, you weren't anything. And so I felt really down in school because I wasn't going to university. And because I didn't really know what I wanted to do. Having my brothers and my dad in trades, as diesel fitters, I knew that I was always pushed to go, pushed to be motivated to go that way as well.

Kathleen:

And I suppose I spent a bit of a year denying it before finally letting the universe guide me and put my feelers out there to see what trades were available about a year after I finished grade 12 and did a mechanic apprenticeship at a dealership. And I finished my mechanic apprenticeship and my husband and I moved town. Just having that on my resume, got me a job at the sugar mill where we moved to. And I worked as a pointsman on the locomotives for a season. And then once again, put some feelers out in the universe because I wanted something technical again, and I seen an ad for the

telecommunications industry and thought, well, I suppose it's just wiring for one giant big car. I can do that. And yeah, I've been with the company ever since.

Anne- Host:

And Kat it sounds to me that you always seem to want to be in the mechanics area that you grew up in that environment and there was no discussion. Everybody got their hands dirty and everybody went into that space. Bec you also came from a completely different angle. So you started your traineeship at 40 years of age. When you were at school Bec, what was your career goal? Can you think back to then? And it's not that far away when you were back at school, what was your goal or what were you given direction on, or what did you want to do? Tell me a little bit about that.

Rebecca:

Yeah. School was quite a way away to now for me. It was in the nineties. We had different learning techniques that were very limited and I believe to what's available now. So I actually had a bit of a horrid time during school. I wanted to be a nurse and my careers advisor at the time said, "What would you like to do Rebecca when you finish." I said, "I want to be a nurse." She said, "Well, aim lower you don't have the intelligence." So at that stage, there was quite a bit of damage done with that sort of support. And because of the way you learnt, you wrote notes, then you studied, and you passed exams. That style didn't suit me. I obviously sort of thought, oh, well I can't be a nurse then. So I just didn't know. I floated in the breeze, tried many different things and ended up having babies quite young. So started having my family, my husband and I when I was 20 years old. So, I suppose that put everything on hold. Fast forward to now when I got the opportunity to commence my traineeship in cranes. I had realised where I did sort of spoken up to was I'd started a role on the mine site, low level of skill. I was water jetting so it was very physical. It was very, if you wanted to upskill, you had to get your own tickets and that was very expensive, but I just found these golden key people in amongst a haystack that were prepared to support you and teach you. So unlike Kat, I didn't have the opportunity to operate machinery on farms and things like that. So I sort of grew up going "oh, you can't be a crane operator, you can't even drive in reverse, let alone drive a crane", and just things like that. I say I started truck driving and I got my bobcat ticket and I had this really good trainer and then someone said, look, and I'll start putting my feelers out. What area where do I really want to be, what do I want to do? And I just researched, asked questions, Googled. And this traineeship came up on site and that style of learning just with my language, I'd go out, I do the practical, watch a lift, I'd come back and study a bit and I'm doing a lift. And it just gelled. And so now I just want to keep on learning. It's really, really changed.

Anne- Host:

Is the fact you're never too old to get started. It could be that you start straight out at 18 or 19. Or, you do it at 40 or 50 or 60. Yeah. I mean, wherever you want to start. Kat just for the audience, you said the word OP can you just describe that. It's obviously a very, very specific Queensland terminology. Is it? An OP?

Kathleen:

Yeah, so I think it's changed now, but back 10 years ago when I graduated, you would sit one or two big exams not just for your QCE your Queensland certificate of education, but you would sit a big exam. And out of that, it's kind of averaged out between your school and the rest of your cohort. You would have a score given to you, I think between one and 25, which is an OP score, one being the best 25 being the

worst. And that would ultimately tell you what subjects you could do at university. So things like psychology and things like that, you needed to be right up the top. I think around five.

Anne- Host:

So really, and had been set fairly early in your schooling that you're to going to be on a university pathway or that you won't going to be on a university pathway. So when you said to your school counsellor or your school advisor, "Hey, I want to be a mechanic." Was that conversation ever had?

Kathleen:

No, not at all. It was pretty much, if you knew what you wanted to do and you knew what's specific apprenticeship or traineeship you wanted to do, they would try and make that happen as a school based apprenticeship. If you knew what you wanted to do, and if you weren't doing enough OP subjects, you could do that. But there was no real general conversation of, hey, you're not really going for OP, have you thought about a trade, or have you thought about doing a traineeship because you're not going to university. A lot of those kids, I feel kind of fell through the cracks in that respect.

Anne- Host:

I wanted to talk to you about perceptions versus reality. So in acknowledging that there's a lot of research and reports and they are speaking about parental fears or misconceptions about the industry, or it could be reality. I'm not denying that. Of the working conditions, how females are treated on the job, and in talking about career paths and what they can actually do with that. I thought I'd have a chat with you and ask for your input about the reality for you. What was it like? So Kat can I start with you in regards to your role in the technician role that you're in now. How far is reality from that perception? For you in regards to your working conditions and the team around you and how you are treated.

Kathleen:

I have, yeah, I can't fault any of the blokes that I've met in telecoms. They've just been unbelievably supportive, amazing. A lot of the women that do succeed in industry often have a sense of, you do have to prove yourself. I would think I was kind of lucky in the sense that already having completed a mechanical apprenticeship, I kind of had an element of respect already there. Going fresh into something like that, though I can completely understand why women would be scared and parents in particular scared to send their children, their daughters and sons sometimes into female dominated industries. And I think a big part of it is the wording that we use. We use females in male dominated industries to describe somebody straight away.

Kathleen:

And I feel if we were to just remove the gender from these conversations, and you just have someone that loves working with their hands, loves getting outdoors, wanting to be a technician. We wouldn't have the fears that surround this. And eventually we might have more women as a statistic in these industries, but I think it starts with just removing the gender from this all. Because 60 years ago we were telling women that you can't do that. You're a woman, you can't do that. But we have headlines of female and male dominated industry today, which still kind of says, "Wow, I can't believe she's doing that. She's a girl." We've still got the same amount of scepticism decades on of where we've started. And so I think it comes from removing the gender conversation from these and just letting people do what they want to do.

Anne- Host:

Okay. I mean, that's an incredibly good point. Absolutely. I'll give you that. So with the conditions in regards to- were there people around you, how did you get the support that you feel that you needed support at all? Or you were incredibly fortunate ones that just moved into a team and there was no, the reality was there was no difference at all, so that you thought.

Kathleen:

Actually. Yeah. And I know that's really hard to believe considering the stereotypes that you do here, but the team that I went into, you have your odd jokes, but you just feed it back to them as much as they feed you. Everyone's going to joke about it because you are the elephant in the room to begin with until you earn their respect, until you prove yourself to them. And I feel like as soon as you are overcoming that hurdle and they know that you can take a little bit of a joke, you just have that banter with them and you just move on from it. And after that it's done, it's buried and you don't need to look back at it.

Anne- Host:

And Bec, what's your reality in your workplace?

Rebecca:

Yeah, look, you don't see it. I don't see any issues at all in working in the actual environment, in the mining environment. If there's no female toilets to be able to use in the area you're working in, you report it and it gets fixed immediately. The management and the companies are really embracing a variety of diversity in their workplaces. So the thing that I have struggled with is society's expectations and where I've probably caught some of the hardest criticisms. So some things like, I've worked with a lot of women up North. We would work in fly in, fly out, and we all sort of have the same story in the sense that you get criticized by the mums at school or other people going "how could you leave your children like that, what sort of a mother leaves their children and deserts them", it's like, well, no, I am supporting my children. I am educating them in that you need to aspire to what is real for you and what you'll succeed in.

Rebecca:

And you're not leaving them home alone, that they're either with their partners, in my case my parents has helped me with the kids while I pursued the career fly in fly out. So that was very, very hard to break that mould. And at home in that environment, you did really, really cop a flogging. At work, you're just part of the team. One thing I will say but, it is how you introduce yourself into that environment. So, okay. So a non-traditional gender role for males would be florist or a hairdresser. So a male going into a florist, or a male going into the hairdressing environment. They obviously need to read the play and behave in a manner that suits that working environment. Well, the vice versa a female going into a male dominated role you don't sit there like, no, I'm not sledgehammering the valves today because I just got my nails done yesterday. You've just got to really adapt. And I say be transparent as a person. And eventually those people who do at first criticise end up taking you on board, and I have found have been some of the biggest educators.

Anne- Host:

So some of the things I'll take away from that, is first of all, in some cases it may actually be people of your own gender. That are some of the ones that you're actually struggling with in regards to their

acceptances, the fact that you're moving into those roles. And the other thing you were talking about was the reading of the room, or reading of the team, and this doesn't change. Does it? It doesn't matter what business that you go into, what team. You have to be part of the team, each one play their part in that team, and they have to be showing whether they are male, female, young, old, how they are going to be contributing to that team and being, would that be a good summation of the conversation that you were saying? Yeah?

Rebecca:

Yeah. No. If you don't mind, I'll just address that a little bit more. One of the things a senior person involved in my traineeship and it's not in my employment actually in the Traineeship side of it said "Oh, yeah I hear all the time employers want females because they're better operators, they check on the machinery. And they're more precise." And I said, "Well, I actually beg to differ with that because some men I work with are amazing operators, their knowledge, and their experience, and their capabilities, are next to none. It's whether you want to be in that role." So I found the men who weren't that great in the roles were the ones that just sort of came in as a TA. And then they taught me how to go do my crane tickets because then I had to operate. So now become a crane operator. Don't really enjoy it but you know I make a quid. So I think it's very, very individualized.

Anne- Host:

Yes. And that's not gender at all. Is it?

Rebecca:

Absolutely not.

Anne- Host:

That's actually a great attitude to work. Yes. But can I address something else? A lot of the times the trades are seen as definitely not a lot of office work but they actually are seen to be quite outdoors. Can we have a bit of a chat about the perception about heavy lifting? So some of the things that come out of it is that quite often in a lot of these trade areas there's quite a need to be doing either heavy lifting, or working with a lot of heavy equipment, or machinery that requires a certain element. Can you talk to me about that perception. Once again, what's the reality. Kat would you like to start that conversation?

Kathleen:

Definitely. Pretty much workplace health and safety these days, I think, permits lifting of 20 kilos by yourself, which most able bodied people, female or male can lift that. And anything more than that, you need the assistance of mechanical aids, a second lifting person, an assist, anything like that. So it's really a very old, old myth that's tied to traineeships and apprenticeships because yeah, workplace health and safety won't stand if they see you lifting anything really heavy anymore, it's just, non-existent. It's definitely more of an endurance thing throughout the day.

Kathleen:

Me personally getting into pits, lifting a couple of things, holding my position for a long period of time, but you're really going to get that in any job that you do, there's going to be, I struggled to sit all day now, whereas I know people that can sit throughout the whole day without a problem. It's just about personally what you enjoy and what your physical level of endurance is, but as for heavy lifting and that

really heavy kind of work . Oh definitely the hours when they're long and when you have crap jobs in bad positions, you're always going to have the odd one, but ultimately the real hard slogging stuff of the past workplace health and safety say no now.

Anne- Host:

Okay. Bec do you want to talk to us about swinging your sledgehammer? And some of the things that you were talking about that we were talking about before. Can you try and expand on what type of thing in that sense?

Rebecca:

Yeah, so I'm currently working as a refinery operator. So the crane operating sort of supports and backs up, it's a sidestep off of what I'm doing now. So the refinery operating, we do around 15 kilometres a day, walking, we probably do 6,500 stairs a day up and down. The sledgehammering – we sledgehammer open and close valves and door locks and what have you, there's, same as Kat, there's some roles that you need to be squatted down in really awkward positions for quite some time. And look, you get your tools to suit you when you start these roles, you're 'pre-employment medical-ed'.

Rebecca:

So you're actually assessed to ensure that your body is capable of doing the role sufficiently. And it is very capped and limited as to what you'll be lifting these days. And it's about attitude. If you go in saying I'll do some of it but not all of it, it's not going to work for you in that job. So you've just got to really give it a go. Every male, female, whoever I work with, if you go, "Oh, can you come and give us a hand with this. I'm struggling it's a bit tough. I can't get this valve open." No one, no one judges or no one criticize it. You might get "ah, step aside I can do it," – that sort of jibe or whatever. But you're never judged for asking for a bit of help.

Anne- Host:

Fantastic. And so Kat did you want to add to that a bit?

Kathleen:

Yeah, definitely. And ultimately I know that as a female and teaching other females in mechanics, you learn to work smarter not harder. Leverage becomes your best friend. The guys start to teach you a couple little tips and tricks for you to be able to get those really hard jobs done anyway.

Anne- Host:

So it sounds to me, I just want to get a bit of a summary. So working through this. So I need to well, really ask you some questions in regards to the training, the vocational training part of this as well. But it sounds to me that you probably really want to have to like the outdoors. You have to be working as part of the team, but your attitude has to be incredibly positive. In fact, you said you started coming in as an unskilled when you first moved into it. So talk to me about – both of you – have gone through a formal traineeship, which involves vocational, education, and training. Can you talk to me about what impact and how important that was as part of the job that you were doing? Bec, can I start with you first and then I'll go to you Kat.

Rebecca:

So, can we just get on with the job?



Yeah. Sure. As I explained I entered in as a low skill level position. So I've learned the safety aspect quite quickly to work in a harsh environment. So alumina, you have to work with caustic. Caustic is one of the main chemical solutions that help create the Baya system of our process. And so you learn your safety aspects, but as for the cranes the best way to have been introduced into that industry hands down is traineeship because I knew cranes lifted heavy things and put them up high into hard to reach places. That's about where it ended. So when I went through the traineeship I was trained one on one most of the time, I just was taken through so thoroughly in the industry and the theory side of things was available to me at any time, if I had any questions, anyone was prepared to help. So it was a really, really good way that the traineeship was two years long. I finished it in a year. I actually went through it quite quickly and quite successfully, and that was a lot of credit to being trained one-on-one a lot of the time.

Rebecca:

So for me, the traineeship, in an industry I wasn't sure about, and whether it would suit me because there's times where you're out in the rain, when you're rigging you're out in the freezing cold rain, you're contending with your mono goggles steaming up. There's different skills you're learning than in an academical kind of way. And you don't know whether these types of things are going to suit you until you've been out there and done it. So doing the traineeship as I was paid while I learned, I came out with a certificate, had the one on one training with the style of training that suited my type of learning. And although I'm not in that aspect of the industry as much anymore, I still am in the industry, but I've side stepped to a different career that complements the cranes. So it wasn't time wasted, so to speak. So for me, if you're not sure about an industry, but you need something, you need a change, traineeships absolutely hands down the way to go.

Anne- Host:

Okay. And Kat, talk to me about your vocational training experience. What was it like?

Kathleen:

Yeah, so I've done an apprenticeship and a traineeship, and both were extremely similar in the way it was set out where you had your theory, your practical, and your workplace experience. The apprenticeship's four years, the traineeship was two years. When I did my mechanical apprenticeship, it was all in house with the brand of the dealership that I was in. And it was good because it was specific to the brand. I felt like I missed out a lot outside of that though. And we would go through work through the theory and then the trainers would come up from Melbourne to work through our practicals. So that's when you would demonstrate to the trainer your different modules. And then once you had done that particular skill in the workplace, you'd then go to the foreman and ask him to sign that skill off for you.

Kathleen:

And then you would progress through all of your modules. And the traineeship was extremely similar, except we did it more as a group basis. That was very individual. The traineeship, they got everyone through in groups, in block sessions. So you did it all together as a team, which I thought was a better way to learn it because you weren't sitting there by yourself kind of working it and figuring it out. My training group, we were all walks of different lives. So I was a mechanic at that stage. We had electricians, we had ex-army, ex-navy guys in there. And we would pretty much with all the experience in the room when we were doing our theory together and doing our practicals, we could pretty much

figure everything out and go to the trainer and get it all done. And then a part of that, you had to keep a diary of all your workplace experience to get that signed off as well.

Anne- Host:

So sounds to me that it is incredibly comprehensive and there was a lot of work that goes through it, but it was all complementary to what you're doing and you are backing that up by, when you're undergoing your traineeship and apprenticeship. That you're actually working on the job and you're able to actually apply that immediately.

Kathleen:

Most definitely.

Anne- Host:

So, it was immediately, yes relevant to what you're actually studying. And it wasn't a generic skill that you're thinking a lot about what this is all about. Maybe I might apply it later on in my life. So I just wanted to ask you if you think about your future, I wanted to think about what you're doing next. And also what are you thinking about doing any more training? Where's your career going next? What's next. Bec would you like to start with that?

Rebecca:

Yeah. Well, it's funny you say that. Only last week that I met with my employer and we got together a bit of a career progression plan. So, yeah, I'm actually looking at going into leadership. So having learnt from the ground up, I've still got quite a lot to learn in the side of refinery operating. But my five year goal or so is to be in a leadership mentoring kind of role where I can assist people coming through. So I will look at doing project management, leadership project management in time and to complement learning from the ground up the refinery. So as a leader, a lot of the comments are like, well, what will she know, she's never done this before. Well, that's an aspect they can't use when you go through it. And of the stats at my current employer is that a lot of leaders coming through started off as trainees or apprentices. So a lot of the people who ended up going right through to leadership roles were the ones that started from the ground up.

Anne- Host:

So that they've done that work, they know what it's about, and they know the operation side. And then they go and get through the skilling and up-skilling for the vocational, through leadership project management, to just continue on that journey. That's fantastic. Kat what about yourself?

Kathleen:

Yes. Since the awards that definitely opened up a lot of doors for me. After going through that process I was selected for our leadership course within the company as well. And I've successfully completed that. Since then, I've been doing a lot of covering my manager and a couple of other managers in their leadership roles, managing different teams in the region. And then also they've recently started putting me sidestepping into business support roles for the leadership team as well within the company. So yeah, it's definitely been a lot of progression and it's just been really good.

Anne- Host:

You know what, it's been fantastic to hear the impact on the training awards that they have given you. The work that you've done and the decisions that you've made to move into the apprenticeship or the traineeship space. And in some cases people might ask, "why would you?" For instance Bec, you're in HR, you're moving through that. So for you to stop, take a breath and move into a new space, people are always going to say, "was that worth it?" And it sounds to me in both of your cases, that things are now moving in leaps and bounds for you in your career and in your life. So it's fantastic to hear that, so well done. Well done. I wanted to ask you about advising others, influencers, career advisors. So there's a research that's out there. There's so much research out there that talks about the importance of advice, starting at a really early age to break this stereotyping, and to introduce the range of career options. And how important the influence of parents and schools are on the decisions people, women and men, make when they would study.

Anne- Host:

And also further complicating it is the fact that a lot of parents in schools generally don't understand career pathways in the trade. There is a history of career advisors encouraging the idea that trades are good for kids who don't have good grades, that aren't academic, which is a really damaging misconception. Definitely. If you're just listening to the work that you guys are doing, the technicalities that you're now dealing with the work that you have to undertake. I suppose people don't realize that becoming a trade specialist, can lead you onto a larger career path and everything like that. So my question to you after going on, because I'm quite passionate about this, what would you say to parents of high school students, and careers advisors who are listening. Why do we need to get more gender diversity into the trades? Why do we need to have this conversation? What is the advice that you would give?

Kathleen:

I would say, just keep in mind when we look at the school system, it is completely geared to realistically send kids to university. You've got subjects in senior physics, chemistry, and math A, B and C, everything like that. You've got maybe woodwork and metalwork, which are the only two practical skill-based subjects. And to just keep that in mind that a lot of kids that I know went to university because it was comfortable. Because they already figured the classroom environment out. They figured out how to thrive in that environment. They didn't necessarily know what they wanted to do. So they thought they'd just go in and do a Bachelor of Arts or something. And it was because most of the time they were comfortable, they didn't quite know what they wanted to do. And I think to ultimately, it's a big step going from school based classroom environments, into a workplace. It's a massive leap. And it's a lot of fear and anxiety to overcome to get to that point.

Kathleen:

I think that ultimately to make that gap smaller, you need to put in more things like we see in the States of auto shop into schools and trade specific subjects into school. So kids are first comfortable doing that, seeing if they like it. And then so that leap of going into an apprenticeship or a trade isn't as great. And they're not as scared that they're not going to like it because they've already had some exposure to it. And I suppose ultimately keeping that in mind, you then have kids that go out into university, do four years of university rack up a HECS debt. If you go out there and do an apprenticeship, you come out four years after that, realistically with no debt, you've been on a little bit of a low wage for some time, but you come out of that nine times out of 10 with a guaranteed job. You're not coming out into a stream of a bunch of graduates who are trying to find and snuck up those jobs at the same time, ultimately as well.

Anne- Host:

Okay. Bec would you like to add to that? What would your advice be the parents or the influencers in regards to giving advice regarding entering into the trades area? Especially in a trade area which is, it's been very difficult to encourage equality and diversity of people into it.

Rebecca:

I'm going to go in from a quite a different perspective here. I'm going to go in as being a mother. So prior to me making my career change, I always push on the kids finish year 12, come on. You're not successful at all if you don't finish year 12. Where you want to be, what do you want to do? Like sort of push, push, push for these sorts of decisions to be made by kids who just don't know what's out there yet. So when, my son, he finished year 10, and he was ready. He wanted to be independent. He wanted to start doing something other than being in the educational facet of going to school and in a classroom environment, he wanted to grow and learn further. So we did a bit of research and we sourced a pre-apprenticeship for him. So he did a pre apprenticeship in air-con/fridgy and then landed an apprenticeship. So I started just doing a bit of research and there's people there to help, it's out there and just research and try not to have blinkers on and have an open mind and give things a go.

Anne- Host:

I do want to say that one of the great things is that one of the reasons I think also that people, there's all these changes occurring. And one of the things that also can help people feel more comfortable in moving into trades area, be it male, female, whatever, is your idea and there's a whole network, and there's a whole groups of people and associations that are out there that are there to help. And it might be gender specific help, like Tradeswomen Australia, or SALT, or it could be just something in regards to supporting people through the complexity, like an apprenticeship support network. You know that sits there and helps people go through all the paperwork, the documentation, people who have issues. So, I mean, there's a lot in there.

Anne- Host:

And one of the main reasons why people do finish there is all the support that's actually available for them. I do want to say, thank you very much to yourself, Rebecca and to Kat for sharing your journey and your insights. It's been really inspirational. So much of your message is exactly the same in regards to the teamwork, the positive thinking, being part of something and being prepared to put your hand up. And the fearlessness, I would say, of your decision to undertake apprenticeships and traineeships, in both of your spaces and move into that vocational education side. So thank you very much for sharing it. It's been an absolute pleasure to have you here today.

Rebecca:

Thank you Anne

Anne- Host:

Thank you very much for joining us for this podcast. We hope that you enjoyed listening. If you want more information on vocational education training, career pathways and your own way to succeed, check out the National Careers Institute website, you can find them at [nci.dese.gov.au](http://nci.dese.gov.au). This podcast was an initiative of the Australian Government. We looked forward to you joining us for another episode in this podcast series, but in the meantime, please stay safe and take care.