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## **Victorian disability advocate wins national community sector award**

A Victorian disability advocate who helped lead an anti-discrimination wage case on behalf of workers with disabilities has won the Social Impact Award at the 2014 HESTA Community Sector Awards.

Kairstien Wilson from the Association of Employees with Disability Inc. — trading as AED Legal Centre — has been recognised for her role in challenging a Government-designed wage assessment tool that provided workers with disabilities an average hourly wage of \$3.20.

Ms Wilson said the landmark anti-discrimination case affected about 20,000 workers with disabilities employed in segregated workplaces around the country.

“For the last 10 years, my colleagues and I have been challenging the Federal Government’s wage assessment tool that delivers lower wages to workers with disabilities than an existing validated market-based tool does,” she said.

“About 80% of these workers have an intellectual disability or cognitive impairment and could be regarded as among the most vulnerable segment of the Australian workforce.

“The Majority of the Full Bench of the Federal Court found the wage assessment tool was discriminatory and should be discontinued. This decision was confirmed in a unanimous decision at the High Court. The Government applied for a three-year exemption from the Disability Discrimination Act in the Australian Human Rights Commission and was recently granted a 12-month exemption.”

Ms Wilson said she was now assisting Maurice Blackburn Lawyers and members of the Victorian Bar in a representative wage compensation case to obtain wage justice for workers with disabilities.

HESTA CEO, Anne-Marie Corboy presented Ms Wilson with her award during the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) National Conference in Brisbane on 11 June 2014.

“We’re proud to honour Ms Wilson’s long-standing commitment to advocating on behalf those experiencing disadvantage in our community and the significant impact of her work,” Ms Corboy said.

Ms Wilson received a \$5,000 ME Bank *Everyday* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant courtesy of long-term awards supporter, ME Bank.

“This is a very complex and expensive project to run and we are struggling for funding dollars,” Ms Wilson explained.

“The prize money will help our clients with the cost associated with obtaining medical reports and paying the fees to file their claims.”

The Unsung Hero Award winner — Kat Armstrong of the Women in Prison Advocacy Network, (NSW) — also received a \$5,000 ME Bank *Everyday* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant. Organisation Award winner, the Hobart Women’s Shelter, received a \$10,000 development grant.

The HESTA Community Sector Awards are presented in partnership with ACOSS, the peak body for community services in Australia, as part of its commitment to building a strong, sustainable community sector, supporting the needs of people affected by poverty, disadvantage and inequality.

HESTA is the leading super fund for health and community services, with more than 770,000 members and \$27 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

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