

CREATING A BRIGHT FUTURE

POLY-EMP: SUPPORTING AND ADVISING



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photograph by **ALAN STEVENS**

EHRAJ BAKHTEVARI IS A POLITE 20-YEAR-OLD WITH A BIG SMILE AND THE AIR OF A YOUNG MAN WHO KNOWS EXACTLY WHERE HE'S GOING. HIS LIFE IS VERY GOOD; HE HAS PART-TIME WORK IN THE INDUSTRY HE LOVES, HAS JUST PASSED HIS LEARNER'S DRIVING LICENCE AND IS A HAPPY YOUNG MAN. HE ALSO HAS A MILD LEARNING DISABILITY.

He started his first job with Tyres4U in Avondale, Auckland about three months ago.

Due to his disability, life — particularly work opportunities — could have been very different for Ehraj. Growing up in Malaysia, he was slow to speak and initially his mother, Vitiah, blamed the fact that she spoke to him in Tamil and his father in his native Farsi.

His language skills improved when the family moved to New Zealand in 2000 and English was spoken at home, but he had reading and pronunciation problems at school.

"I worried too much about his future, how he could earn a living and . . . run his life without me. But, now he is a brave young man and mixes easily out in public," Vitiah says proudly.

Following his schooling at New Windsor Primary, Blockhouse Bay Intermediate and Lynfield College (where he gained NCEA Level 2), Ehraj went on to study at Unitec's two-year employment skills programme.

He was then referred to Poly-Emp, a charitable trust that helps people with intellectual and learning disabilities find paid employment.

It is an employment and advisory service for young people who graduate from Manukau Polytech and Unitec's programmes.

"During our Job Club sessions (held fortnightly for job-seekers), we picked up that Ehraj was interested in all things to do with cars," explains his Poly-Emp Employment Advisor, Melinda Hayes.

has a staff of about 35 in Auckland), who are open and keen to do things a bit differently, and want to help young people get ahead.

Garth Holdaway, Warehouse Manager at Tyres4U, is happy with Ehraj's work, and is impressed with his willingness to help and join in with the team.

The team at Poly-Emp are always keen to hear from like-minded employers who are happy to offer young people the opportunity of being part of the workforce.

As for Ehraj, he enjoys the continued support of weekly visits from Melinda along with Garth's encouragement.

KEY FACTS



- **POLY-EMP IS AN EMPLOYMENT AND ADVISORY SERVICE FOR GRADUATING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES.**
- **THEY CURRENTLY SUPPORT ABOUT 100 PEOPLE ACROSS AUCKLAND WHO ARE IN WORK OR WHO ARE LOOKING FOR WORK.**
- **POLY-EMP SUPPORTS EHRAJ BAKHTEVARI IN HIS WAREHOUSE JOB AT TYRES4U IN AVONDALE, AUCKLAND.**

She has already noticed improvement in his general confidence since starting work.

Ehraj agrees that the warehouse job in the tyre-importing company is the kind of job he always hoped for.

He began initially by keeping the warehouse tidy, but now his role has been extended to include grooming the company vehicles.

Poly-Emp currently supports about 100 people across Auckland who are in work or who are looking for work. Their service manages to negotiate employment opportunities for nearly all the young people who are referred to them. The jobs are paid roles and under the same terms and conditions as other workers.

Many of the employers they work with are small- to medium-sized businesses (Tyres4U



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For more information on the services of **Poly-Emp**, visit www.poly-emp.org.nz