

## **Deafness no block for James Jamie First**

Whether it be hammering, drilling, sawing, sanding or grinding, building sites are inevitably noisy places.

But that's not something James Vea needs to worry about.

The 22-year-old carpenter is a regular on *Channel 9's* popular reality TV show *The Block* ... and happens to be deaf.

"I feel like I'm equally as capable as anyone else," Mr Vea said.

"It's really unfair because a lot of us struggle to find employment and are discriminated against because of people's perceptions about what we can do.

"I may not be as quick and it may take me a little bit longer to learn the skills, but, over time, I can."

Having completed pre-apprenticeships in building and construction, along with plastering, Mr Vea is now a third-year trainee at Greenwood Renovations.

Born deaf, he said he has always been interested in carpentry.

"I love everything about it. There are different challenges that I face ... but I am pretty determined and flexible ... so I manage to get around them."

Employer Michael James said while a lot of thought went into hiring Mr Vea, he has never looked back since.

"It has not been easy, and I am definitely not an expert in sign language, but we've developed our own little codes that help us communicate on site," Mr James said.

Using mime, gestures, drawings and the written word, as well as Auslan to converse, Mr James said it is about being vigilant.

"The hardest problem is that there's a lot of background noise, which then takes away James' minimal ability to hear, so gaining his attention can be really hard work.

"We take extra care and go through a lot of detailed planning to make sure he gets it."

Mr Vea said while it is a learning process and takes patience, ensuring those around him are educated and aware of his situation is just as critical.

"People are pretty good at adapting to me and soon realise what I'm capable of, but Michael has to explain to the others that I am deaf so they know I'm not ignoring them."

Captain of a deaf rugby team, Mr Veal has plans to start his own business in the future and said he is proof that if you are focused, you can make it.

Although Mr James admits he wouldn't have been able to get by without the help of Vicdeaf and SensWide (which provides support for jobseekers with a disability), he said Mr Veal has opened his eyes.

"He has taught me not to take anything for granted and that anyone can achieve whatever they want, provided they are prepared to have a go, and people are prepared to give them a go."