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Mandy is an NDIA emerging leader in the Batemans Bay NDIS office.

The 36-year-old is an NDIS participant herself with a psychosocial disability, having been diagnosed at the age of 16.

Mandy said she has experienced stigma since first being diagnosed, when a psychiatrist told her she would never get a job, and later when a disability job agency told her she would never be able to work in the health sector.

‘Whenever somebody says something like that to me, I always think, I am going to prove you wrong. I’m stubborn,’ she said.

‘My disability means I have to work harder than other people in some areas, not that I can’t do it!’ she added.

In 2016, when she saw a job advertised at the NDIA, Mandy said she thought it would be ‘pretty cool’ to work there and help others. She applied and got an interview.

‘At the interview they asked me did I know much about the NDIS. I said, “No, but it sounds fantastic and is going to change everything! I want to be a part of it!”’ she laughed.

Mandy got the job and started as a business support officer. Over time she worked her way up to a planner and was successful in gaining a role as a team leader.

‘I said to my manager I want to be a team leader because already I’m helping 4 participants a week. If I’m leading a team of 10, and they are each helping 4 people a week, then I’m helping 50 people a week – 40 participants and 10 staff,’ she said.

‘It’s why I get out of bed, that motivation, to help as many people as I can.’

Mandy uses her lived experience to help participants. She said she understands where they are coming from, but realises every situation is different.

‘I find there are always common feelings of stress, anxiety and sometimes sadness, but there’s always hope for the future with NDIS support,’ she said.

‘When I talk to people I get it, and I sense it’s a bit of a relief for them, they don’t need to go through every little detail. Depending on the disability, I know supports that can help.’

‘It feels good to say I get it, it will be okay, and I can help. The amount of people who say, “Thank God someone who understands” is amazing!’ Mandy said smiling.

But she also uses her experience and understanding to decline supports not needed.

‘My strategy to decline is not to say no but to give another avenue like mainstream support,’ she said.

‘I like to educate people on what information we need for justification, so they understand and can come back, or I talk to them about how they can build capacity themselves.

‘Often people want someone to do this and that, but if a report states you can do it, empower yourself to do it. We can help prompt and teach you but build your capacity.’

Mandy also wants the NDIS to succeed. ‘I know it’s helping so many participants, so if I’m declining something that doesn’t need funding, that money is going to someone else who really needs it,’ she said.

Mandy has been an NDIS participant herself since 2021.

‘I could have got in earlier, but I didn’t apply. I try to be independent, but since having my plan, I have built my capacity to live an easier life with skills I didn’t have,’ she said.

‘I’m just so thankful for everything the NDIS has given me!’

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