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Riddick Lowkie can’t believe he’s landed his dream job.

The St Albans Park NDIS participant and his 5-year-old Siberian Husky Sway now work for Maudcare, a Geelong-based disability service.

Working a few days a week, they support other NDIS participants in group or individual settings. Riddick teaches participants and staff how to work with animals, and Sway, under Riddick’s command, provides comfort, love and affection, and does a few tricks.

Luke, Riddick and Sway’s boss, said the duo have a calming effect on participants.

‘Riddick and Sway have fitted in effortlessly and their work is incredibly beneficial,’ he said.

‘Our participants look forward to them coming and their faces light up when they arrive!

‘We’ve even had some participants attend our service for the first time who don’t want to mix, but when they see Riddick and Sway, their boundaries drop without realising.

‘A conversation starts up about Sway, and then they are joining in and socialising. Sway is like a bridge, bringing people together. It’s incredible to watch,’ Luke said.

Identifying as having autism and other challenges, Riddick, 30, said it’s the first time in his working life he has felt like he’s in the right job and he’s making a positive difference.

‘I love seeing the connection participants have with Sway and how she helps them to regulate physically and emotionally. Everyone loves her and she loves them. It’s the best job ever,’ he said.

Riddick credits Renee, his employment coordinator from Access Your Supports and his 2 bosses, Luke and Adam for helping him achieve his dream job.

They’ve all been so supportive, and it wouldn’t have been possible without them,’ he said

‘I met Renee and her daughter at a local dog park. Renee commented on Sway, and we started talking. I mentioned how I’d love to work with Sway. Then Renee said where she worked and how she could support me given I’m an NDIS participant,’ he said.

‘The following day I was starting a volunteer role at Geelong Animal Welfare Society. I was a bit

nervous about it and within days Renee was able to support me. She’s been great.’

Riddick said Renee helped to build his confidence and ease his anxiety, and she worked with him on the job to break down tasks to help improve his time management.

Renee said she was aware of another volunteer program, Story Dogs, where pet owners could take their dogs into schools, and students were let out of class to read to them.

‘I talked to Riddick about volunteering there, so he could get more experience. He was keen, so I contacted the local coordinator. We all met. It went really well, so Riddick and Sway started volunteering at a couple of local schools once a week,’ she said.

‘I had also met Luke and Adam at a disability expo. I was talking to them about Riddick and Sway. I said what an incredible impact their Story Dog work was having on students.

‘I also mentioned how I was supporting Riddick to get Sway certified as an accredited therapy dog, and how we were hoping it could lead to some paid work for them.’

Renee said Luke and Adam were keen to know more.

‘Luke asked if he and Adam could meet Riddick and Sway, so we set up a meeting.’

‘Within days, Riddick and Sway were working at Maudcare. At first they did an hour a week to see how it would go. It soon progressed to 2 hours, then 4,’ she laughed.

‘Now they work 8 hours a week over 3 days,’ Renee said. ‘They get paid, the participants love them, the staff love them, everyone loves them. It’s like it was just meant to be!’

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