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When 21-year-old Queenslander, Bryden joined the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), his goal was to find a job where he could help children learn. He also wanted to live independently and lead his own life. Now, at 27, it’s reality.

Bryden, who has Down syndrome and hearing loss, is a teacher’s aide at a local state school and he’s flourishing living independently away from his family home.

With NDIS and Carers Queensland support, Bryden has been able to not only transform his life, but the lives of others – his mum Denise, his 3 siblings, and the students, teachers, and the wider school community he supports.

Denise said Bryden’s NDIS employment capacity building funding was crucial. It meant he was able to explore different career paths and learn the skills he needed to find and maintain work.

‘Using his employment funding, Bryden engaged a specialised NDIS disability employment provider,’ Denise said.

‘He was introduced to Bec, an employment support worker, and they started working together.

‘Bec asked Bryden about his goals, interests and skills and matched jobs to them. She also supported him to do a resume; showed him how to apply for jobs and helped him prepare for potential interviews.

‘Bec posed questions to Bryden that employers might ask and supported him to polish answers in his own words.’

Denise said one morning she saw a job advertised in a disability advocacy newsletter. A local state school was looking to employ a teacher’s aide with Down syndrome.

Denise, a teacher herself, said she discovered the school’s head of inclusion understood the value of inclusive employment.

‘The head of inclusion was looking for someone with lived experience who could support a prep student with Down syndrome – to act as a relatable role model. The idea was to give the student a mentor – someone to connect with,’ she said.

‘When I showed Bryden the job ad, he lit up. His dream job was to help children learn.

‘Bec and Bryden got straight to work. They went through the selection criteria, prepared his application, uploaded his resume, then Bryden hit submit.’

Not long after, an email arrived inviting Bryden to interview for the position. He chose Jared, his older brother, to sit in as a support person. As it turned out, he didn’t need help.

‘Jared came out of the interview and said, “Mum, I’ve always been proud of Bryden, but now I’m even prouder. He answered every question himself. He nailed it”.’ Denise said.

Not long after, Bryden began working 3 mornings a week supporting the prep student – their connection was instant.

‘We just got each other,’ Bryden said. ‘We knew how we felt; we trusted each other, so it did help us to bond.’

Bryden’s Key Word Signing has supported other students too. A rare skill, he adds borrowed Auslan signs to spoken words. The technique has helped students refocus on their work and in turn improved classroom behaviour.

‘Children with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other various learning styles respond well to Bryden’s calm nature and these visual cues,’ Denise said.

Seeing the benefits first-hand, the school offered Bryden more hours. Now he’s working 3 days a week.

Bryden’s job has boosted his confidence and improved his speech.

‘Since Bryden’s been working, he’s had to think more about how he pronounces words so students can understand him. I’ve noticed his speech has become clearer,’ Denise said.

Bryden’s ability to support students and to fulfil his role also highlights the benefits of hiring people with disability.

‘Bryden is showing the value and commitment people with disability can add when employers give them an opportunity,’ Denise said. ‘He’s proof how valuable it is to employ people with disability.

‘Inclusion is everything. Bryden has helped staff see the potential in all students. He’s changing mindsets and showing with the right support, people with disabilities can contribute and achieve great things.’

Bryden’s abilities are also admired outside of work.

‘Often, we overthink – make things more complicated than they are – but Bryden has this incredible ability to look at the facts, solve the issue and be at peace with it,’ Denise said.

‘When things get tricky, we say, “What would Bryden do? Let’s channel our inner Bryden”,’ she added, smiling.

Today, Bryden feels proud, happy and secure in his job and home life. He hopes to travel interstate and overseas to visit his brothers.

‘Working as a teacher’s aide is my dream job. I love it,’ he said. ‘Supporting students to learn makes me happy.’

Bryden’s story shows what’s possible with the right support and workplaces that embrace inclusion. His success is improving lives, attitudes and communities.

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