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Employment can be meaningful and rewarding for everyone.

The community awareness campaign, ‘Discover Micro Enterprise – Exploring the Possibilities Project’ is funded through an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant with the Department of Social Services (DSS).

Community Living Project has launched an 18-month campaign in South Australia to spread the word about the benefits of micro enterprise employment for people with significant disabilities.

“The first question people often ask is ‘What do you do?’” said Project Leader Helen Neale. “We want to give people a dignified answer to that question.”

CLP’s Micro Enterprise Project (MEP) supports NDIS participants to build their own small businesses, tailored to their individual talents, passions and needs.

Participants use their NDIS funding to access support with MEP, which guides them in creating, launching and operating their own small enterprise.

Gawler jeweller and NDIS participant, Jak Thomas, 33, lives with an intellectual disability and owns a micro enterprise called Jak’s Gems, which has been carefully designed around his personal interests and abilities.

“Jak has always loved gems and minerals, since he was a very little boy and when we were thinking about meaningful work for Jak, it seemed a natural fit for him,” said Jak’s mother, Fiona Campbell.

“I have always held firm to a vision for a good life for him, a life filled with ordinary and extraordinary things as a part of a local and wider community. Jak’s Gems is part of that vision.”

Jak works with raw gems and minerals, tumbling, cutting, shaping, polishing and transforming them into beautifully polished stones and striking jewellery pieces, which he then sells at markets and by word of mouth in his local community.

He has ongoing support from an MEP personal assistant, funded through his NDIS plan, as well as a group of people within his community who give freely of their time.

“I have been able to pursue my love of gems, minerals and beautiful jewellery, and to meet others with a similar passion and interest,” says Jak, who cannot read or write but has a talent for creating beautiful jewellery.

Jak and his mother have shared their own experience of micro enterprise at a face-to-face seminar in their hometown of Gawler.

MEP manager Jayne Barrett says NDIS support for people with significant disabilities to own their own micro enterprise benefits them in a myriad of ways.

“People who live with significant disabilities have traditionally only been offered recreation services in day programs, or possibly sheltered employment in segregated settings,” she said.

“People are often bored and underwhelmed in these settings. Many people are looking for something more. It’s an amazing transition for people to think I can do something great, there’s something I can offer. People are being seen to make a contribution, they are building skills and they’re engaged and moving around in their community, engaging with money, going to the bank, meeting with suppliers.

“It goes beyond having a job and becomes a way for people to be truly engaged in their community.”

Jayne’s own daughter Amanda lived with multiple significant disabilities, including non-verbal cerebral palsy, but with good support owned a candle-making enterprise and studied at university.

“Micro enterprise offers a rewarding employment pathway for people like Amanda who have traditionally been seen as having nothing to contribute to society. I knew if it was possible for Amanda, it was possible for others.”

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