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For proud Ganggalidda woman Gaylene Johnny, a commitment to showing others they can was the driving force in the 45-year-old from Doomadgee's push towards achieving her goals.

Connecting with the right supports to manage her own needs through her NDIS plan, Gaylene, who lives with a mental illness, was wanting to pay her experiences forward in the best possible way.

Linking up with disability service provider, My Pathway, Gaylene is now a disability support worker assisting others, and her journey from NDIS participant receiving support work to now also providing it, has filled her with pride.

"I was starting off again a few months ago and looking to get back to work," Gaylene said.

"Because I've had an up and down life and have been through a lot, I thought social work might be the job for me.

"I'm loving it so far…it's different each day. I'm happy to be helping with the community."

Gaylene lives independently after moving out of her family home 7 years ago. Having a support worker assisting her and helping her around the house since becoming an NDIS participant in 2020 inspired her employment goal.

Gaylene began receiving NDIS supports from My Pathway in May 2020 and started work as a support worker in January 2021.

Working casually in the role, Gayle identified goals of creating financial stability, and she and the disability service provider were able to identify personal and professional skill building opportunities.

Supported in exploring employment, Gaylene completed a traffic control course with Doomadgee Council as an opportunity towards earning an extra income in seasonal contracts, before moving into support work full-time recently.

One of 14 My Pathway support workers in Doomadgee, Gaylene is currently completing a Certificate III in Individual Support, and is assisted with her working schedule and planning.

Gaylene's own support worker, Nalani, is also now her colleague. Combining the skills she has learned with culture, connection, and care, Gaylene is thriving in her role.

"I go out with the participant mob and help them out with cleaning and that kind of thing," Gaylene said."

"I also sit around and yarn with them, and talk to them about day-to-day stuff, and we also go out onto Country and go fishing.

“I love my fishing and getting to go out with family and support workers to take the participants out. Some of us support workers went fishing with them when we were children, so, those memories are so amazing, and it’s wonderful to see those smiles on the faces.”

Long-term, Gaylene’s goals are to continue to build her independence, with saving to buy a car, travelling, and obtaining a blue card in hopes of providing support to children, all part of the plan.

However, recently spending 3 weeks in hospital having a stent implanted after being diagnosed with heart disease, Gaylene said she was determined to look after herself better and tell other mob of her experiences, so it doesn’t happen to them.

With NAIDOC Week approaching, which is a major celebration in Doomadgee, Gayle’s dedication to using her own experiences to help and inspire others means this year’s theme of “Get up! Stand Up! Show Up!” will take on extra significance in the short-term.

“We have a big NAIDOC event and parade, and I’ll go out and meet up with family for a big feast,” Gaylene said.

“It’s good (being a support worker), and the NDIS has been good for me. I had different jobs before, but I hadn’t been stable enough, but with the NDIS, I’m stable.

“I’m happy to be here as part of the community and showing we can.”

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