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As living costs increase and more people find themselves in need, Nathan Cousins is giving back to his community, learning to cook meals and donating them to Strike It Out – a Launceston not-for-profit charity, supporting the homeless and others doing it tough.

The 21-year-old Beaconsfield NDIS participant, who has psychosocial disabilities said he couldn't be happier participating in Multicap Tasmania's initiative, which is also supporting him to build his capacity to find and secure paid work in his preferred field, hospitality.

Once a week Nathan joins a group to learn how to cook healthy meals at the disability provider's Tamar hub in Launceston. But support worker, Melissa Sutczak, said while Nathan and the rest of the group enjoyed learning to cook, many were non-eaters.

"While it was a great little program, I kept thinking if they're not eating what they've cooked we could be doing something more meaningful with it, so I asked the group how they felt about donating their food to a local charity, and they loved the idea," Melissa said.

Thrilled to do something meaningful to help the homeless and those in need, the group now do a big cook up each week. With staff donations flowing in, Melissa said she has hardly had to touch the cooking programs budget.

"Everyone has been fantastic," she said. "As a group we decide what we are cooking then we let everyone know, so if we decide to cook pasta bolognaise, people drop off pasta, mince, sauces, and they even donate money for the group to buy extra ingredients.

"It's so nice to see so many people who want to get in and help and our participants are so happy knowing that in cooking these meals they are helping others. It's priceless."

Nathan said the cooking program has been amazing for him and it's helped build his skills and confidence not only to work, but to contribute and feel included in his community.

"In our cooking program we have a lot of participants who are wheelchair users, they need a bit more support, so I've been able to cook my own dishes and help them too," he said.

"Then I help Melissa package the food and we deliver it to Strike It Out. They are always grateful, and they even take photos of our food and post it on Facebook to thank us.

"I love the fact I'm doing something meaningful to help others while they are helping me, and I hope doing all this volunteer work may one day lead to finding paid work for me.

Melissa said Nathan's NDIS funding has really helped him and he has come a long way.

“Nathan was quite shy at first, but he’s really come out of his shell. Now he’s such a friendly outgoing person who just loves helping others,” Melissa said.

“Nathan is also doing work experience in a church café. We helped him to get his resume in order and supported him through the interview process. Now he’s feeling much more confident, so he’s started applying for other jobs. He’s also looking to volunteer at Strike It Out soon to help the team sort out clothes which is great,” she said.

“Another proud moment for me was when Nathan got his learner’s permit. I cried I was so happy. Nathan was in disbelief but so happy when he found out he passed. Now we’re supporting him to clock up some hours.”

Grateful for his NDIS funding and where it’s got him today, Nathan said when it all boils down, his main goals are to get his driver’s licence and secure a job so he can buy a car and one day be independent enough to move out of his family home.

“I’d really like to be independent and lead my own life, but I knew I needed support and that’s what Melissa and my other support workers are helping me do,” he said.

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