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In a fast-paced world when staying in a job for 5 years is a milestone, Robert Pearce is a standout.

Rob, 60, who lives with an intellectual disability and Multiple Sclerosis, proudly clocked up 40 years of paid employment in North Sydney this year.

His exceptional achievement has been honoured by NDIS provider and employer, Aruma Disability Services.

Aruma presented Rob with a long-service award for ‘consistent dedication to his job’.

“I was really happy, very proud to receive the award,” Rob says.

Rob has spent his working life in printing and packaging, recently moving to NDIS provider, Sunnyfield disAbility Services, where he works five days’ a week.

Rob says working – and contributing to his community and the economy – gives his life value and purpose.

“I help with packing products onto pallets, they get wrapped up and sent off onto trucks for distribution,” he says.

“I like that it keeps me busy, I’m doing something worthwhile, it gives meaning to my life, and I love the routine. I love every day that I’m at work.”

Rob is supported to work through his NDIS plan. An employment support officer helps him at work, and he has transport assistance to and from work.

“I think it (the NDIS) is amazing,” Rob says. “It’s doing a terrific job. If I didn’t have this support to work, I might be just sitting at home, bored, doing nothing.”

Diagnosed with schizophrenia at 16, Robert says his disability presented many challenges as he entered his adult life.

But support from his parents, family, community, and more recently the NDIS, all helped to grow his confidence and independence, and to live his best life.

“There wasn’t as effective treatment for mental illness available 40 years ago compared with what we have today,” Rob’s sister and guardian, Janet Currie says. “However, Rob’s recovery thrived when he could return to supported employment.

“He’s someone with such inner strength and a great philosophy of self-discipline, going to bed early at night so he can get up early and get to work on time every day.

“We are very grateful Rob has this happy work life, that he has a job he enjoys and good friends, and that the NDIS is supporting that.”

Rob’s employment support officer at Sunnyfield, Danyelle Dowden, says she admires Rob’s commitment and strong work ethic.

She has known Rob for nearly 30 years – since they first worked together at House with No Steps (now Aruma).

“I always have fond memories of his calm and friendly demeanour, his willingness to help others and his compassion to work,” Danyelle says.

“Robert’s dedication to work and his work ethic have not faltered over the last 40 years.

“He has done an outstanding job, fitting in, learning the new processes and tasks and making some new friends along the way.”

With no retirement plans on the horizon, Rob hopes to continue working every day, even though he was recently diagnosed with MS and has difficulty getting around.

As for the secret to a long working life, Rob says it’s all about persevering through the hard times – and a strict daily routine.

“You just gotta get on with it, accept the challenges, take care of yourself, keep exercising and healthy eating, and keep persevering,” Rob says.

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