Posted on:
5 September 2023

School leaver William Pel has hit the play button on the next phase of his life, with job-ready supports leading to volunteer work at his community radio station.

William, 19, of Kyabram, in northern Victoria, has been a volunteer at Echuca Moama Community Radio (EMFM) since he was in Year 12.

Before graduating, William accessed employment supports through his NDIS plan.

William, who has autism, was unsure about how to negotiate the transition from school to work.

He met with local NDIS provider Connecting Futures, who set up work experience and other activities to help him build his skills for work.

William met weekly with his career mentor to develop his employment goals and life plan, while also working on his independent living skills and his ability to travel.

His love for computers and gaming set him up for his first work experience at a Kyabram computer store to explore pathways in the industry.

Since receiving NDIS employment supports, William says he is ready for new opportunities.

‘I’m sitting here because of employment supports,’ William said. ‘It was the most important thing to happen to me in the past few years.

‘Without it, I wouldn’t be doing my volunteer work at EMFM. I wouldn’t even know about EMFM.

‘I wouldn’t be doing half the stuff I’m doing now.

‘Employment supports helped kick me out of my comfort zone. It made me want to achieve my goals.’

Prior to becoming an NDIS participant in 2017, William struggled with social interactions.

‘It’s a challenge living with autism,’ William said. ‘Sometimes, it makes me feel out of place.

‘Before the NDIS, I wasn’t doing much in terms of social participation.

‘Now I’m doing volunteer work. I’m going out more.

‘Pathways have been set up, and I feel confident in my abilities to source paid work in the future.’

Connecting Futures career mentor Alison Thorp says William, like many his age, was anxious about the next step after school.

‘We helped William to navigate that gap between work and school, whether he was looking for paid or voluntary work, or further study,’ Alison said.

‘Volunteering is what William loves to do. Music, gaming and computers also came up a lot.

‘William also dedicates much of his spare time into learning game design, and hopes to develop his own game in the future.

‘He has developed so many great skills from weekly support, work experience and volunteering. It’s set him up for paid work in the future.

‘These experiences have contributed to a massive growth in William’s interpersonal skills’

Through his employment supports’ funding, Alison helped William create a resume and prepared him to connect with employers.

She helped him apply for a tax file number and to gain a driving learner’s permit.

From there, Connecting Futures set up work experience stints at EMFM to catalogue their music collection and other local businesses, such as the Echuca Moama Riverboats Festival.

Soon, William was offered permanent volunteer work at the radio station while he explores his options for paid work.

Known as the ‘digital librarian’, William sorts EMFM’s songs into genres.

‘It’s one of my favourite things to do,’ William said. ‘I’ve been doing it for a few years. I love every minute of it.

‘I handle all the music. They have a catalogue of about 14,000 songs and I line them up for the presenters.’

William also volunteers at Murray River Tea Rooms, where he learns hospitality and retail skills.

‘I make coffees and serve customers,’ William said. ‘It’s fun and I’m learning new things.’

And while he loves to volunteer, William is not done with study just yet.

William has completed a Certificate 1 in General Education at Indie College in Echuca and is studying for his Certificate 2.

Alison says William achieved amazing results while engaged in employment supports.

‘William tried a bit of everything and really got involved, Alison said. ‘That’s why it’s helped him. He’s been willing to give things a go.’

William says he plans to spend more time honing his skills as he sets his sights on paid work.

‘I can highly recommend employment supports to other Year 12 students on the NDIS,’ William said.

‘If you have an idea of what you want to do, employment supports can turn that idea into reality.’

Related Stories and videos

It’s official, Sutton Grange NDIS participant Henry John is right where he wants to be.

Henry’s V/Line dream comes true just in time for Christmas

21 December 2023
Sam’s has built confidence and capacity to pursue his opportunities.

Sam builds independence and job skills with youth employment assistance

15 October 2023
Supported employment journey helps Priscilla discover passion for working with children

Priscilla is loving life, work, and her increased independence

13 January 2023
More stories and videos