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When leaving school unsure of which path to follow in life, Jonathan White just knew he wanted to give himself a sporting chance.

Affectionately known as ‘Jono’, the 20-year-old from Geelong, who lives with a chromosomal condition and intellectual disability, was unsure of what may lay ahead.

But combining his love of sport with career ambition, the NDIS participant has become a swim instructor and is now leading an all-round fulfilling life.

‘I always liked swimming and did it through school. I got a second place in regionals in a 4x50 freestyle relay team,’ Jono said.

‘I was working in hospitality and my dad said ‘let’s look at teaching. I researched a course, and 2 days later, I started.’

Out of the pool, Jono is an all-round sports lover. A cricket tragic, he loves to spend his summers wielding the willow with Marshall Cricket Club.

While his sporting pursuits are supported by his close-knit family, Jono’s success in navigating the workforce with confidence was built through NDIS Employment Assistance.

The capacity building employment funding supported Jono in his pathway from school to employment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jono linked up with NDIS provider 4gr Employment Consulting Service.

Building on his employment skills, 4gr worked with Jono to find employers that matched his likes and interests.

Jono undertook a swimming instructor course before engaging in interview preparation and planning with 4gr. He then secured a casual role with Geelong Aquatic Centre.

In 2022 Jono landed a second job with the Geelong City Council’s Leisurelink.

‘Coming to 4gr is like going to work,” said Jono’s 4gr employment lead and mentor, Nina.

‘With Jono, we delivered a training model to build a foundation of job-ready skills through simulation sessions both face-to-face and online. Ahead of Jono’s interview, we did some role playing and preparation, and helped him get ready.’

Jono now works across Monday to Saturday shifts at Geelong Aquatic Centre. He also works 3-hour shifts on Wednesday afternoons at Leisurelink Aquatic and Recreation Centre.

Performing a range of duties, Jono teaches children and primary school groups the critical skills of swimming.

While supervising and instructing a range of school children in the water can be overwhelming, Jono said building skills through his 4gr training and support had really benefited him.

‘I love the job, but my communication skills needed work,’ he said.

‘Now I’m just really putting myself out there and trying to be a bit louder. I’m trying my best, and the coaching really helped me find my voice and confidence.’

Building on that confidence, Jono took the next step in securing his long-term employment goals by deciding to study towards the end of last year.

Supported in contacting education providers while researching his options, Jono enrolled in a Certificate III of Fitness.

With a long-term goal of becoming a qualified personal trainer, Jono receives support from Nina to organise the filming of role-plays and complete assessments.

Through employment mentorship, Jono said he was supported in managing his stress levels and anxiety when he begins to feel overwhelmed.

‘I’ve coped pretty well, and Nina is always there for me,’ Jono said.

‘We work through things and if I say, ‘I can’t do this’, it’s great to have that support as then I know I can.’

Following the course, Jono said he’ll continue to build towards a future, with an aim of securing a traineeship or full-time job on the horizon.

In his personal life, Jono uses his NDIS supports to engage support workers and occupational therapy, as he works towards his goal of independent living.

‘My support workers check-in on me to see how I’m going with work and my course,’ Jono said.

‘Occupational therapy helps with my organisational skills. I’ve tried to get my confidence up with cooking, packing things up, cleaning my room and that type of thing as I’m looking forward to moving out eventually.’

Whether it’s excelling in work simulations, wowing the kids in the pool, or simply making his way in the world, Nina said Jono had a lot to be proud of.

‘Having access to employment funding through the NDIS, can really change somebody’s life. As Jono’s mentor, seeing his growth and confidence build has been amazing to witness,’ she said.

‘Jono should really be proud of himself.’

‘I’m definitely proud of how far I’ve come,’ Jono added.

‘The NDIS has been really important for me.’

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