Sam builds independence and job skills with youth employment assistance

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Sam Valavanis is taking control of his future.

He’s looking forward to a busy working life and fulfilling career.

The 21-year-old is building a broad range of skills that make him more employable by participating in youth employment assistance, funded by the NDIS.

School leaver employment supports open up future pathways and job prospects by building Sam’s capacity for employment, and providing work experience opportunities.

‘There's many different aspects to youth employment assistance,’ Sam says.

‘The main focus is to help people get the right skill set for employment. It also looks at different employment options for them.’

Sam has been blind from the age of 4. It was a challenging start to life for him and his family, who he lives with in Berwick, Melbourne.

But Sam’s progress toward independence has been amazing, and he is gaining practical benefits from his NDIS employment support.

‘They teach us all sorts of things, like budgeting, and hands-on stuff like using tools, horticulture, cooking, and making coffee,’ Sam says.

‘We also get to do work experience and volunteering, which we can do as a group or individually.’

For Sam, meeting others has been an important outcome of school leaver employment supports.

‘We get together socially every fortnight and go to a movie, a restaurant, or a park,’ Sam says.

‘So we travel and use public transport together. I’m learning to do that on my own, but it is also good to do it in a group.

‘The social aspect is important because you gain awareness of how other people think.’

For the time being Sam sees youth employment assistance as well worth his time.

‘I’ve really enjoyed it and I can see myself doing it for a while longer,’ Sam says.

Sam is also working towards his goal of being a radio broadcaster.

‘I’d love to be a presenter on a prime-time program for one of the major commercial stations,’ Sam says.

He recently completed a radio broadcasting course with the Community Media Training Organisation, designed for people who live with a disability.

‘A lot of people I’ve spoken to have said they see me as someone in radio,’ Sam says.

Sam’s capacity to gain skills and build his career prospects have been made possible by his NDIS plan focus on orientation and mobility.

This builds Sam’s capacity and confidence to leave home and travel by himself, a big factor in his independence.

‘I love public transport. So I’ve been learning how to use trains, trams and buses independently,’ Sam says.

‘I have also learned to use apps that help me get around, and how to ask people for help if I need it. And I’m looking to learn how to use taxis and Ubers on my own.’

With NDIS support, Sam has significantly improved his ability to get out and about without relying on other people.

‘It’s going really well. Thanks to the instructor I'm confident now to travel on my own,’ Sam says.

‘Only 2 or 3 years ago my parents and I would never have imagined that I could use public transport. But now I can travel independently.’

Sam’s ability to travel and work independently will be even more important in the future.

He wants to help others by being an advocate for young people who live with a disability.

‘I want to help spread awareness and encourage others to not be defined by their disabilities,’ Sam says.

‘The media is a very large-scale way to do that.’

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