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With dreams of becoming a mechanic, Arjuna is on the road to success after completing an inclusive training program providing people with the tools to find work in the automotive industry.

Arjuna, 21, of Logan, in South East Queensland, completed the general mechanics program at Wheelnutz Garage in 2022.

The garage is a supported learning space for people with disabilities to develop vehicle maintenance skills.

A NDIS participant since 2016, Arjuna says he had always struggled with anxiety as part of his autism.

This anxiety affected Arjuna’s education and his ability to find work after school.

‘When I was younger, I was really anxious about everything,’ Arjuna said.

‘I had trouble staying on task. I couldn’t focus on anything for long.

‘The anxiety levels would go up every time I went out. It was always a challenge.’

However, Arjuna is now thriving after doing the Wheelnutz program, funded through his NDIS plan.

‘The anxiety has dropped away,’ Arjuna said. ‘I don’t get anxious much anymore.

‘Going to Wheelnutz has made me far more employable.’

Since completing the course, Arjuna has gained full-time paid employment, landing a job locally thanks to his newfound skills.

He works with a diesel mechanic, maintaining trucks and excavators for a house removal business.

‘I mostly work on the Mack trucks that transport the houses once they’re split up,’ Arjuna said.

‘Honestly, it means a lot to have found a job that I love.’

‘It’s opened up a whole bigger world of opportunities.

‘It’s allowed me to buy a car. I can also afford to go out and socialise.’

His mum, Sarndra, says Arjuna’s come a long way since completing the Wheelnutz program.

‘Arjuna’s always wanted to be a diesel mechanic and now he’s on the path to getting there,’ Sarndra said.

Aside from employment assistance, Arjuna’s NDIS plan includes support to build his independence in his daily life and the community.

‘Support workers help me to learn to do daily tasks such as house cleaning, shopping, and preparing healthier meals which give me more energy.’ Arjuna said.

‘A support worker also helps me at the gym so I can stay fit.

Arjuna also attends regular occupational therapy and psychology sessions.

‘Arjuna has the right supports around him and that’s why he’s done so brilliantly,’ Sarndra said.

‘We’ve got two wonderful support workers who helped Arjuna transition into the workplace.

‘They work to keep Arjuna moving forward. He’s come so far. It’s been incredible.’

Gold Coast couple Gavin McCarthy and Jade Burgmann created Wheelnutz in their home garage in 2020.

The NDIS provider offers a Mechanics Program (11 to 67 years) and a Junior Mechanics Program (6 to 12 years). Many of the trainers have lived experience of disability.

Both programs aim to build a participant’s capacity, whether to pursue their interest in cars or to gain paid employment within the automotive industry.

Manager Shannon McCarthy says Wheelnutz gave Arjuna not only the skills, but also the confidence, to gain paid employment.

‘Arjuna and all those who attend thrive in the program, so do their carers and parents,’ Shannon said.

For now, Arjuna has returned to Wheelnutz to keep his skills fresh while recovering from a sporting injury.

‘The supports I have around me are awesome,’ Arjuna said. ‘They’re the best anyone can get.

‘From my NDIS support workers to the guys at Wheelnutz, a loving family and a great job, life doesn’t get any better.’

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