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Queensland NDIA planner, Michelle Owens, loves supporting people with disability.

An NDIS participant herself after a car accident left her with an acquired brain injury, Michelle said she often draws on her lived experience to help others.

‘It gives me a real understanding of the types of supports people need,’ she said.

In 2002, Michelle, a general practitioner (GP), immigrated to Australia from South Africa with her husband and 2 children.

To continue working as a GP, Michelle passed her Australian Medical Council exams. Then to further her career she started studying to pass her GP Fellowship exams.

Not far off completing her Fellowship, Michelle was involved in a car accident. She was in a coma for 3 months and spent another 6 months in rehab. Her studies were put on hold.

When she returned home, Michelle had to come to terms with her new disability. The whole family had to make a lot of changes to their home and day-to-day life.

‘The difficult thing with a brain injury is, you have a certain level of function, and then suddenly your function is reduced due to your disability,’ she said.

‘For me, it was hard to judge what I could and couldn’t do. I had this recollection of what I could do in the past and so I didn’t stop to think, I’d just go to do things.’

Michelle was determined to recover and overcome her challenges. She worked hard to reprogram herself to understand what she could and couldn’t do.

‘I continued intense rehab at home, but I was desperate to get out and do something. I struggled to find work,’ she said.

Then Michelle came across a Brisbane City Council traineeship program. With support, she successfully applied and completed a Level 1 Administration Certificate.

‘It was such a positive experience. It gave me the additional qualifications I needed after my name. It helped me secure a job with Queensland Health,’ she said.

‘My NDIS supports are a blessing. My husband works away from home, so without them I wouldn’t be working!’

In 2019, Michelle’s employment provider was supporting her to find work, but she saw a job advertised for an NDIA planner, decided to apply herself and she was successful.

‘Now I work with a really supportive team who understand my disability and mentor me,’ she said.

‘The Agency’s Workplace Adjustment Passport has also helped. It saves me from having to repeat my accessibility and inclusion needs to each new direct report.

‘I love being a planner. Helping others gives me a great sense of satisfaction.

‘As a GP, I’ve devoted years to study, and the path I’ve chosen here means I can still provide support to people. It’s what I have wanted to do right from the beginning,’ she said.

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