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Since joining the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in 2018, Smithtown local Jake Kelly has been steadily working towards his goal to be fully independent.

The 23-year-old has Down syndrome and uses his NDIS funding to partner with Kempsey disability provider Key Community Group (KEY), to develop his skills and independence.

Assigned a job mentor and a team of support workers, within a year Jake had secured his first paid job, working 2 afternoons a week at his local supermarket, Kempsey Central IGA.

‘It’s a great job. I love it. I help customers, staff and my boss Amanda,’ he said.

Jake stocks shelves, fills fridges and ‘faces up’ stock. He also helps out in the storeroom unloading trucks and sorting stock. Now he’s learning to use the cash registers.

Jake’s KEY NDIS coordinator Jane Lewis describes him as a confident, capable and effective self-advocate.

‘Jake might not realise it, but he’s already quite independent, especially at work. He’s a valued team member, and popular with staff and customers,’ she said.

Jake lives with his dad, Todd, a local and interstate truck driver. Eager to share the load at home, Jake has been learning to make hearty meals, tidy the house and do laundry.

A huge National Rugby League fan, Jake referees sideline touch footy and during the week he goes to the gym with a support worker to build his strength and fitness.

Jane said Jake really enjoys starting his weekdays off with a bit of fitness.

‘Jake and his support worker might go to the gym or head along the local walking track. It’s about a kilometre and a half, but now Jake has decided to set himself another goal, to run it non-stop!’ she said.

‘Jake has run the track about 5 times now and he’s improving. His first attempt was 10 minutes 52 seconds and now he’s down to 9 minutes 42 seconds.’

Jane said Jake has come a long way and his unwavering commitment to achieving his goals has made him ‘a bit of a role model in his community.’
‘Jake has really grown and matured. He’s saving to buy a house, and he’s talking about

learning to drive. He would like to get his Learners Permit and buy a car,’ she said.

‘He is determined. He works hard at every goal he sets and it’s paying off.’

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