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A twist of fate has led to a special partnership between a Benalla man Tim Arendt, and Geelong disability support worker Bo.

Tim, 20, was in the midst of year 12 exams and contemplating his university prospects, when Bo came into his life.

Diagnosed with autism as a four year old, Tim desired to study at Deakin University in Geelong but for his family this posed a huge challenge.

“The prospect of many trips to Geelong to support him to achieve this was daunting for our family,” Tim’s mum Kerrilyn said.

“I just thought it couldn’t be possible unless the family moved there and was with him all the time.”

That’s where Bo came in.

Tim had received funding from the NDIS which included speech therapy, psychology, occupational therapy and a support worker.

After a visit to an occupational therapist in Yarrawonga, Kerrilyn was put in touch with Bo, who was based in Geelong and coincidentally, happened to be studying psychology, the same course Tim hoped to study.

During Tim’s ‘gap year’ Bo introduced him to travel options from Benalla to Geelong.

One weekend a month they would travel to Geelong where they would visit the landmarks and sights, and Bo helped Tim to develop independent living skills like shopping, cooking and general familiarisation with the town.

They also stayed in university accommodation to help Tim adjust to what his new life in Geelong would be like.

“Bo is a godsend, there are so many things they have done together, including music festivals and concerts. Tim said at the Download festival he socialised more at that event, than he did in six years of high school!

“Thanks to the NDIS support which allowed Bo to become part of Tim’s life – he has come such a long way. With this support it has allowed our family life in Benalla to remain much the same.

“Without the NDIS funding, we wouldn’t be able to have Bo supporting Tim, but money can’t buy the kind of support Bo gives to Tim.”

Now, in his first year of his degree, Tim is achieving great marks, and living independently on campus in Geelong.

The charismatic Tim has expressed ideas about becoming a university lecturer, with a natural flair for public speaking the perfect fit for a career at the front of the classroom.

“He’s very hard on himself to get really good marks, Bo’s helping to learn that there is also life outside of university.”

As for Tim’s dreams for the future, Kerrilyn says she is proud of the fact he is living away from home and achieving in his studies.

“It now seems possible that he will be able to complete his studies, work in a job he enjoys and feel part of a community.”

Tim echoed Kerrilyn’s sentiments and expressed his gratitude at the support he is receiving.

“I am grateful for what the NDIS has given me the opportunity to do. I do consider myself fortunate that I met Bo and now consider him a friend.

“Gratitude is too soft a word to describe how I feel about him and the NDIS, as they’ve both given me the best chance I have to succeed in the future.”

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