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9 October 2019

Alice recently completed a Certificate III in Disability Support at TAFE after more than a decade as the principal carer for her husband Steve, and she is about to start the 120-hour placement that will see her become a fully qualified disability support worker.

Alice has spent years juggling her twin needs to support Steve and bring home an income, working part-time and after-hours roles “first as a cleaner, then in retail”.

“I’m really looking forward to a change of career,” she said. “I’ve always enjoyed helping people and I’ve already put my name down at a couple of disability support employment agencies.”

Steve has the genetic condition Usher syndrome, which caused congenital deafness from birth and the gradual onset of blindness from the age of 30.

The Sunshine Coast resident was granted access to the NDIS last year, aged 64.

“I had to surrender my driver’s licence in 1992 as my peripheral vision dropped away,” Steve said. “I could still read a newspaper up until 2008, then that went too.

“I’ve basically got no depth perception, which is why Alice has had to spend so much time driving me around.”

With his plan approved at the start of 2019, for the first time in a long time he no longer has to rely on Alice to support him in everything he does.

Steve said he couldn’t be prouder of his wife, who also has qualifications in book-keeping and business administration.

Steve and Alice Hardy

“Seeing what Alice has done has inspired me to contemplate my own return to the workforce,” he said.

Steve had a 30-year career in local government across two states, built up business-related TAFE qualifications and almost completed a university degree along the way. A self-driven man, he has always taken enormous pride in standing on his own two feet and providing for his family.

Then he was forced into early retirement in 2014.

“Being made redundant when I felt I still had a lot to give caused me so much distress,” he said.

After a tough few years, Steve’s NDIS plan now pays for support to get him out of the house, into community activities and back into physical exercise. It’s also funded training in new screen-reading software and there is extra money allocated for software upgrades and bathroom modifications.

“The NDIS pulled out all stops to get me on when the scheme went live on the Sunshine Coast on 1 January this year,” Steve said. “Since then I’ve had great support from Carers Queensland and Kathryn, my Local Area Coordinator.

“Over the past few years I’ve kept myself busy being an advocate for the NDIS and for other members of the Deafblind community.

“I was appointed an NDIS Champion in 2016, I sit on the National Deafblind Information Hub run by Senses Australia, I’ve participated in lots of NDIS workshops and now I’m getting ready to join the National Deafblind Steering Committee.

“I’ve got a lot to experience in the disability sector and with the NDIS, and I reckon combining that with my office administration, finance and problem-solving skill set I should give me a good chance of picking up a bit of part time work,” Steve said.

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