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If you're heading down Newcastle's Hunter Street and feel a thirst coming on, Ben Andrews is just the man to make you one of his signature barista coffees or set you up with an ice-cold craft beer.

Ben is possibly the happiest barman on Australia's east coast and certainly the proudest of his ability "to pour the perfect beer", according to employer and mentor Luke Tilse.

"There's nothing Ben enjoys more than pulling beers and making coffees," Luke says. "He handles all aspects of the bar including the till, and he knows exactly what all his regular customers want."

Now 29, Ben has worked at The Happy Wombat since completing his Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) course several years ago. This in itself was a major achievement for Ben, who has Down syndrome.

"Before he started at The Happy Wombat Ben would never have had the confidence to go into a shop on his own or engage in conversations with people he didn't know," his mother Winnie says. "The difference is just amazing."

In 2014 he joined the NDIS as part of the early intake into the NDIS's Hunter trial site, and this was when he got the opportunity to fulfil his ambition to train for a career in the catering trade.

It took Ben 12 weeks to do the RSA course, travelling down to Gosford every Wednesday with a support worker, but he was determined and eventually got his ticket. Shortly afterwards one of his support workers, Chris, happened to see an article about Luke in the local paper, which focused on Luke's experience as the father of a baby with Down syndrome.

"Chris just rocked in one day to say he'd seen the article and thought he'd say g'day, as one of his own clients - which was Ben - also had Down syndrome and was looking for some work experience," Luke says. "And that's how it all started."

"Ben was a bit nervous at first but once we figured out what he liked doing, he just took to the work and is now killing it. We need him as much as we need any of our staff."

Ben does four shifts a week on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, working the bar and making coffees as part of the front-of-house team.

Luke says that as the father of a son with Down syndrome he's found Ben's workplace journey personally inspiring.

“For me it’s a bit like looking at the other end of the spectrum and seeing my own son being where Ben is now, 20 years down the track,” Luke says. “It’s been so educational.”

Being in a mainstream work environment has allowed Ben to pick up a lot of work skills informally, just by being able to ask questions or see how his colleagues do things until he has memorised the process.

“We’ve never put him on a formal training program but by doing things the way we have he now knows all the beers and coffees and how much we charge for them, then tots it all up on the till,” Luke says. “He’ll often run for an hour without needing to ask any questions.”

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