Posted on:
5 October 2020

As the communications and marketing specialist at independent video and digital media business In the Loupe Productions, Shirley Wong works hard to maintain the company's profile in the ultra-competitive Sydney media market.

"I organise all the social media, keep the website updated, write promotional material, respond to business enquiries and do some of the subtitling on the videos we produce," Shirley says.

Except that she doesn't say it – instead, because Shirley lives with cerebral palsy and has always been non-verbal, she uses text-to-voice software installed on her iPad. Since 2016 she has also been supported by the NDIS.

"I am passionate about AAC, which is short for Augmentative and Alternative Communication," she says.

"It's important that everyone has a voice.

"Being non-verbal means that I can see and feel first-hand what it is like to have people assume I can't vocalise what I want or be unable to understand anything. I want everyone to know that even if people can't vocalise, they can still speak in their own way and have a lot to say."

In the Loupe owner Brendan O'Connell says Shirley, who is in her early thirties, is his longest-serving employee and is "absolutely vital" to the success of his business.

"I actually first employed Shirley to sort out my receipts and do some data entry on my accounting software, but after a little while it became apparent that she had a lot of other skills I could use," he says. "We do a lot of work in the disability space and it's always been very important for me to get input from people with lived experience, that's core to the content we create.

"Having Shirley here has changed the way we work and she's also been able to provide feedback on the productions we do, especially on review of content, accessibility and with communication.

"Luckily we've been successful in applying for JobKeeper funding to keep Shirley employed during the current COVID 19 lockdown, which has been a lifesaver for us."

As well as her job at In the Loupe, for the past eight years Shirley has been employed by Northcott Disability Services as an Adviser in Inclusive Practice, delivering training, presentations and workshops in Sydney and regional centres in NSW.

She has also been a Consumer Representative of the Australian and New Zealand Cerebral Palsy Strategy for the Cerebral Palsy Alliance (CPA) since March 2016, which has taken her to Perth as well as to New Zealand to present on the Strategy.

After finishing Year 12 Shirley studied business, bookkeeping and computer studies one day a week at TAFE for a couple of years to enhance her skills.

Her TAFE studies and her work at In the Loupe have now given Shirley the skills and the confidence both to manage her own NDIS plan and to pursue her next goal, which is to set up her own consultancy focused on AAC.

“In the future I hope to run workshops, presentations and provide training to people in the use of AAC, especially for kids,” she says. “I want to improve attitudes in the community towards the use of AAC, and with October being International AAC Awareness Month perhaps there’s no better time to start!”

Related Stories and videos

Wheelchair users the priority for Push Mobility CEO

Shane defied lockdown to keep business rolling

20 November 2020
Promising painter Kerry has staged his first exhibition after joining an art studio that specialises in teaching people with disability.

Passion for painting keeps Kerry on creative path

17 November 2022
Belinda (Bel) Cini is in her second season, employed as a ‘water girl’ for the Geelong Football Club’s women’s team

Bel keeps the Geelong Cats women’s team watered and ready

3 May 2024
More stories and videos