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After years of living with deteriorating vision, Anne-Marie Beranger joined the NDIS as a participant in 2018 – and liked it so much she decided to become an NDIS plan manager.

Hailing from Pottsville on the New South Wales far north coast, Anne-Marie's accreditation came through in September 2020 and her business – The Right Planner – is now up and running.

"I want to put my own lived experience to good use and help others manage their NDIS plans," she says. "My background is in accountancy and audit so I am very good at paperwork and systems, which is a big advantage."

Originally from France, the 47 year old migrated to Australia 16 years ago and has been living, working and raising her son Loic in northern NSW ever since.

"I was born severely short-sighted, due to extremely elongated eyeballs. My eyeballs kept growing – you can't tell by looking at me, but they are now 40 per cent bigger than normal," she says. "That has led to a condition called myopic macular degeneration."

She had her first pair of glasses when she was four and by the time she was a teenager she was changing her glasses every six months. She had her first laser surgery at 18, with many more operations following including procedures to control symptoms from the growth of her eyeballs and implanting a lens in front of her retina.

Despite all, Anne-Marie was able to pursue her accountancy career for many years until finally her sight issues became too much. Five years ago she sought help from Vision Australia after an increasing number of falls.

Vision Australia provided support including training in how to use a walking cane and also helped her apply to join the NDIS.

"I was in a bad place, feeling quite depressed about how my life was going, so when I was accepted onto the NDIS in 2018 it really gave me hope," she says.

Anne-Marie says she is now functionally blind in her left eye and will eventually lose vision in her right eye. Her NDIS supports are crucial in preparing her for this eventuality, backed up by regular check-ins from her Social Futures Local Area Coordinator in nearby Tweed Heads.

"My doctors say it's a miracle I can still see, as most people with my condition would be blind by now," she says. "I can only read by covering my left eye, otherwise everything is distorted."

“I found part-time work as a community disability support worker, which I really like and still do, but I’m used to working as a professional and I was missing that. That’s when I decided to use all my experience to open my own business as an NDIS plan manager.”

Anne-Marie’s NDIS plan funds three support workers, who help with cleaning, meal preparation and personal care most days a week. One of her support workers also takes her out for community activities at night.

Anne-Marie also has funding for assistive technology including a special tablet and screen-reading software, crucial in both her personal and business life.

“Without the NDIS supports I wouldn’t be where I am today, including becoming a plan manager – one of my support workers had to help me with all the forms,” she says.

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