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Unlike many teenagers, Emily West thoroughly enjoyed her high school years. She attended a mainstream school, where she felt welcome and included.

“Emily was always part of inclusive education - that part of her life was never segregated and she loved school,” said Emily’s mother, Julie West of Mitcham.

But life after school was different. Emily, who lives with a significant intellectual disability, severe anxiety, Tourrette’s syndrome and autistic behaviours, struggled to find work.

“She did quite a few voluntary jobs, and while they were relatively successful, none of them led to permanent employment and certainly not paid work,” said Julie. “Emily spent some time at supported day options and that’s the direction we thought her life was going.”

But about two years ago, that direction changed.

Emily joined the NDIS.

One of her service providers, Community Living Project (CLP), suggested an alternative pathway for Emily to find rewarding and meaningful employment—owning and operating her own small business.
Julie admits she was sceptical.

“I had never heard of micro enterprise, and although I liked the idea, I was very unsure it could work,” said Julie. “I never imagined in a moment Emily could operate her own business.”

But today, thanks to her NDIS support, Emily owns and operates a thriving micro enterprise called ShredEm, which collects, shreds and recycles unwanted paper for local businesses and residents who want their confidential paperwork safely destroyed.

Supported by CLP’s Micro Enterprise Project (MEP) and an Enterprise Managerment Group (EMG), Emily has overcome her anxieties to engage directly with customers.

“MEP has supported Emily every step of the way,” said Julie. “ The business has really blossomed and turned out to be a huge success and a very good micro enterprise. And this process of doing work, getting money for that work, is a really inspirational part for Emily. It has changed her life.”

Emily operates ShredEm herself, with help from a facilitator, funded through her NDIS plan.

She says she enjoys being the boss and earning her own income.

“It makes me feel good,” said Emily, 39, of Pasadena whose NDIS plan also enables her to live independently with 24-hour support.

“I love going out into the community and I’m saving to go on holiday to Kangaroo Island with a friend.”

ShredEm is also a hit with Zoos SA and the RSPCA – Emily donates her paper for their animals.

“Emily’s shredded paper provides Zoos SA’s animals with a great source of enrichment,” said Adelaide Zoo Storekeeper Russell Ind.

“It is used by a lot of the animals at Adelaide Zoo and Monarto Safari Park, including rabbits and guinea pigs and the Sumatran Orangutans and Chimpanzees. It’s great to see the animals’ natural behaviours on show as they play, roll and forage in the paper.

“We also love the fact that the paper fits with our values of recycling and reusing materials. Big thanks to Emily for supporting Zoos SA’s conservation work - it’s great to see the community coming together like this and we warmly welcome her donations.”

Julie says Emily’s success owes much to MEP’s idea to create a micro enterprise around Emily’s unique skills and interests, and an activity she enjoyed.

“Emily finds shredding paper very relaxing and therapeutic,” said Julie. “I think that’s a big part of the success, the project itself embraced a previously voluntary activity, and established a sustainable and enjoyable work plan for Emily.

“The NDIS has been magnificent for Emily. Running her own business gives her a sense of importance and independence. It’s just a whole new world for her.”

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