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Alfredton NDIS participant Caleb Richardson can’t believe he’s on his way to becoming an apprentice chef after APM Employment Services helped him secure regular employment, as a kitchen hand, at the Ballarat League’s Club.

Caleb, 22, who has a mild intellectual disability, said like many others he found securing a job challenging, but after working with APM employment consultant, Rhonda Macumber, who matched his abilities and interests to a job, he’s now in reach of achieving his goal – to be a chef.

“I absolutely love cooking. I’ve wanted to be a chef since I was five-years-old, but I didn’t think I would get this far in this workplace because the last time I worked in hospitality I was at Ballarat Special School, helping out in the café and bakery,” he said.

“Then one night, when I was at work, my boss came up to me and started talking to me about doing a Chef’s apprenticeship. It couldn’t believe it. I was so happy.”

Ballarat League’s Club manager, Lee Prentice, said Caleb surprised her with his excellent work ethic and willingness to do any task to support her back-of-house team.

“Caleb’s very enthusiastic. He’s always there in plenty of time before his shifts and he always checks with me or our head chef, first, to make sure he’s doing the right thing, which is really important when you’re working in this type of environment,” she said.

“Caleb’s also very amenable. We all enjoy his company and he’s pleasant to everyone.

“A couple of times when we’ve been busy he’s even taken meals out to tables. He's happy to turn his hand to anything, and to work with us all in various roles.”

Rhonda said she’s so proud of Caleb’s enthusiasm and commitment to his role.

“Caleb has exceeded all our expectations. He’s just moved along in leaps and bounds to the point where he has been offered this apprenticeship,” she said.

“Initially, Caleb was basically a dishwasher, but he’s just got such a good attitude. He’s always positive, and he continually proves he’s willing to give anything a go.”

Lee said Caleb did express some concern about his learning difficulties and the study involved, but she’s come up with a plan to support him.

“I know a Chef’s apprenticeship isn’t all practical work and there’s a lot of study so we’ll be enrolling Caleb in a Certificate III in Hospitality with a back-of-house stream first, so it will help

build his confidence and skills.

“Doing it this way means he can do most of his course on the job – he can study with us and do all his practical work and only have to attend classes a few times,” she said.

Caleb receives NDIS funding to support him get to and from work. He’s also keen to complete his Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) certificate so he can serve behind the bar to be even more valuable to Lee and her team.

“I feel really supported,” Caleb said. “Rhonda calls me every week to check in on how I’m doing and if I need anything. She’s also in regular contact with Lee, who is lovely, so the whole experience has been great,” he said.

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