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Torquay NDIS participant, Dave Barrot, is merrier than usual this Christmas, landing a job at North Geelong’s inclusive Café Bear & Scoobs.

Using his NDIS funding to engage Gateways Support Services, Dave, who has a mild intellectual disability and schizophrenia, secured work after participating in Job Quest, a program empowering adults with disability to build their skills and confidence to gain work.

Now Dave’s happy, working in mainstream employment, gaining even more experience in hospitality, and according to Café Bear & Scoobs owner, Mark, customers are flocking.

“I was blown away when Kendra said I had paid work,” Dave said. “I really enjoy working with Mark and the team, doing anything I can to help – food prep, washing dishes, serving meals and coffees… everyone’s really proud of me,” he said smiling.

Job Quest Coordinator, Kendra Bradbury said Dave had been doing a mix of building pre-employment skills and volunteering at local businesses, but when he started volunteering at Café Bear & Scoobs that’s when he really started to shine.

“Dave loves his job,” she said. “He was really nervous and shy to begin with, but now he’s a completely different man, full of confidence, and the customers just love him.”

Mark, said when Dave first started 12 months ago, he looked down at the floor more times than he’d look at customers, but it didn’t take long for the 44-year-old to become quick on his feet, turn his hand to anything, and build a rapport with customers.

“When Dave was on, people just kept coming up to me asking, ‘Who is that big bloke over there? And they’d say, ‘He’s such a nice guy. The whole room lights up when he smiles’, and it wasn’t just a few people either, I got approached all the time,” he said.

“We’re at our busiest Thursdays and Fridays so I knew I needed to hire someone to cover a three-hour shift on the Friday, then I thought why look for someone when I already have Dave doing such a great job so that’s when I spoke to Kendra about employing him.”

Marks said adding Dave to the books was a smart move given his charm and charisma.

“The customers just love him; he’s independent; he knows what he’s doing, he doesn’t need support, and he gets treated and paid just like any other employee,” he said.

“People talk about disabilities, but for me it’s not about that. As an employer, I chuck out the ‘dis’. You’ve got to look past it. We all have different abilities so my focus is on a person’s abilities, not their disability so we need to give them a chance.

“If you put me in a kitchen, I’ll whip up a storm, but if you put me in front of a computer I’m pretty slow,” Mark added.

“Moving forward, there’s other participants we might be able to employ, so when we return to some kind of normal (following COVID restrictions), there could be some opportunities for them too.”

So excited Dave’s new position “organically” grew into paid work, Kendra said she was “Over the moon” when Mark approached her to offer Dave a job.

“We have a Memorandum of understanding (MOU) with G Force so I never expected any of our participants to be employed like this, but I think it’s the best way,” she said.

“Dave has done really well. Mark and I often say we wish we could show him how far he’s come from when he first started to now, because we’re not sure if he actually realises!

“We are so proud of Dave, and very grateful to Mark for helping to create such a wonderful, life-changing, partnership.” Kendra said.

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