Payal is on path to employment goal with renewed self-confidence

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When Payal Patel discovered she was losing her vision while pregnant with her daughter Mahi, it was the looming loss of independence that hit her the hardest.

“It was scary, so scary,” Payal said. “When my diagnosis happened, they said I can’t drive anymore. I was so worried and so anxious and stressed - like how I’m going to survive? How can I help my daughter?

“I always had an independent life, I made my own decisions. I don’t want to have to always rely on my husband to take me somewhere.

“But because of my vision impairment, every time I needed to go out or go to an appointment, I felt a bit uncomfortable and not confident. It pushed me down and down. I was very anxious and got stuck inside the house.”

Today, Payal is legally blind, but she is no longer isolated at home.

Instead, as well as cooking and caring for her family, she is out and about in her community, enjoying activities like going shopping with Mahi.

She’s also the proud graduate of a Certificate I in Business and on her way to achieving her goal of long-term employment.

Payal recently completed a Skilling Queenslanders for Work program at Vision Australia. The six-month program included a 12-week work placement with Carers Queensland.

“I’m so happy and excited about doing this course and being a graduate - I can’t explain how I’m feeling, I’m like, out of the world!” said Payal, 36, of Runcorn.

“It’s important for me to work. I want to contribute and be productive. I’d like to find work with an organisation, dealing with disability. I’d like to help people in the community who really need help.”

Payal says she owes the dramatic change in her life to support from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Partner in the Community, Carers Queensland, who helped her to access the Scheme and find employment training.

“This course was the way I could get out of the house and do my own thing and gain new skills. This was my me-time that I lost, and it’s happened because of the NDIS,” she said.

“Before the NDIS I was upset, stressed and depressed, and I was stuck inside the house. Now I am pretty confident. With the NDIS, I get so much different help from everywhere; help for my

mental health and depression, and I go on outings with my support worker.

“I don’t need to rely on my husband all the time. I’ve come to know so many new things through a support group and met many new friends too.

“I felt like a bird in a golden cage before, but now I am a free bird, getting this help.”

Payal studied Microbiology in India before coming to Australia in 2007 to be with her husband.

She was working as a Pathology Assistant at the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital when she learned she had a degenerative eye condition, Stargardt Disease, a form of macular degeneration, and had to give up her job.

“I was totally stressed out at work when my disability happened, and was so upset because I’m very passionate about working in health,” she said.

At home with a young child, Payal found everyday tasks increasingly challenging and sometimes dangerous.

“Indian cooking is very time consuming and I lost my speed, I had to do things slowly, but I hurt myself so many times. I burnt myself using the deep fryer, it made me so scared.

“Now, with the NDIS, I’m getting help from my support worker in meal preparation, so that’s making a big difference to me. I’m feeling calm and secure now, I feel great. I want to share with everyone my story about the NDIS because in my community, many people still don't know about this support, which can make life so easy.”

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