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Laura Scurr’s mission to empower women living with a disability to gain meaningful employment after securing her own makes for a remarkable resume.

Determined and driven, Laura, who was born with cerebral palsy, has overcome life and employment obstacles on the way to achieving her goals.

From business ownership and hospitality to mentoring, Laura, 34, has done it all. Now also a disability advocate, Laura said it was becoming a NDIS participant in 2017, which placed her on a path to success.

“Before the Scheme came along, I had nothing,” she said.

“I’d received no support during childhood or my adult life. My family had to pay for all assistive technologies and occupational therapy, or physiotherapy was only partially funded.

“I absolutely love the NDIS.”

Growing up in a in a close-knit family alongside her brothers in Brisbane, Laura increased her independence, moving to Toowoomba for university after graduating from high school.

Laura completed her Bachelor of Commerce and Business, with majors in accountancy and leadership management, and then undertook additional postgraduate studies.

Despite being perfectly qualified and able, Laura was not offered any of the 170 jobs she applied for when looking for work.

“I was turned down purely and solely because of the fear of the unknown in regard to employing a person with a disability,” Laura said.

“I recall one interview where an employer asked what funding they could get if they employed me, while another asked me if my wheelchair was actually necessary.”

Laura took rejection in her stride. After successfully running her own virtual administration company, Toowoomba’s Business Solutions, the opportunity came for her Laura to realise her dream of owning a restaurant.

“When my uncle rang me in 2017 and asked me if I wanted to go into business with him and buy the café on the island where he was living, Coochiemudlo Island, I didn’t need to be asked twice,” Laura said.

“We took over the running of Red Rock Café in January 2018 and I was very much hands on right from the beginning, responsible for HR, bookkeeping, payroll and ordering.”

Later that year, Laura and her uncle took over running the resort on the island. With the ventures merged, the pair began a journey of re-growing the resort business they'd renamed Oasis on Coochiemudlo.

Working 60 hours a week, Laura's life on the island was made a little easier thanks to and a motorised wheelchair. The NDIS-funded chair allowed Laura, who receives Local Area Coordination support from Carer's Queensland, to finally move freely and independently between businesses.

Laura and her uncle successfully ran the operations until 2021 when the impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry became too great, leading to both being closed.

After returning home in September 2021, Laura threw herself into revitalising her virtual administration business. She was also invited to become a mentor for the YWCA's Y Connect Program.

"The Y Connect program aims to empower women and gender diverse people living with a disability to progress their professional networks and employment aspirations. This is something I feel very passionate about," Laura said.

"The challenges faced by jobseekers who have a disability are unique. We often experience discrimination and prejudice, which in all honesty, shouldn't be a part of modern-day society.

Going full circle, Laura also now works to educate local employers around the benefits of employing people with a disability.

"It's just about breaking down the barriers for employers and allowing them to ask questions," Laura said.

"Personally, I would have relished the opportunity if someone had asked me to explain how I would perform a certain aspect of the job I was applying for."

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