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‘’I’m proud of my garden, I filled it with potting mix, brought some plants and planted radishes, coriander, lettuce, turmeric, cabbage, and bok choy and it’s all doing well”

- Lewis Cook, NDIS participant

Coconut Island local, Lewis Cook is in his happy place, planting and watching his garden grow fresh produce for him, his family, and his Torres Strait Islander community to cook and eat.

The 36-year-old NDIS participant used his funding to engage with a culturally appropriate Indigenous support worker, Ivy from My Pathway, back in March.

Together they have grown Lewis’ skills, not only in the garden but doing other activities – cooking, meal preparation, arts and craft, cleaning, and other general household duties.

“I’m helping Lewis work towards reaching his NDIS goals,” Ivy said. “He wants a job on the Island and to become independent enough to move into his own place on the mainland.

Working one-on-one with him is really helping to help build his life skills and confidence.”

With Lewis’s love of gardening, Ivy has supported him to harvest his produce. She is also teaching him how to make a wide variety of dishes for himself and his family.

“Lewis loves cooking,” Ivy said. “He’s even made a recipe scrapbook. It’s good to see him making healthy meals for himself and his family and to see how proud it makes him feel."

Lewis said the idea to create his own garden came about when he and his aunty were walking along the beach and they came across an old, discarded dugout canoe.

“Aunty said it would make a good garden bed, so we brought it home. Ivy helped me clear the yard and we put the canoe where it would get the most sun,” he said.

“I filled it with potting mix, brought some plants and planted radishes, coriander, lettuce, turmeric, cabbage, and bok choy and it’s all doing well,” Lewis added proudly.

Ivy said Lewis is in his garden every day, watering and weeding to keep it at its best.

“The garden is not only helping Lewis to grow healthy produce, but it’s also supporting him to build social skills and to connect more to his community,” she said.

“While he is in his garden, he talks to anyone who passes. He says, ‘Look at my garden. You can have some veggies when they are ready.’

“Lewis is so proud of his garden. It is important to him, and it has taught him a lot – not only about the food he grows, but how to take care of things, how to cook, share meals and yarn more with family and community.”

With newfound confidence and renewed growth, Ivy said she can see Lewis’ confidence, communication skills and independence growing day-by-day.

“I see the joy he gets from his garden and overall, it has really helped to improve his mindset and general wellbeing,” she said.

“I have no doubt in the near future Lewis will become independent enough to actually achieve his goals.”

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