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Like many young people, 19-year-old Priscilla Ragesh wasn't sure what she wanted to do when she was ready to leave school.

Priscilla, who embraces her Singaporean and Indian heritage, lives with an intellectual disability, which impacts her memory, learning and understanding.

'Sometimes I can't remember long words and sometimes I find it difficult to read the (text) book and the questions, so I need to ask for help,' Priscilla said.

'School was up and down and friendship wise, it was challenging, it was difficult to make friends.'

Despite a sometimes-rocky road at school, Priscilla has many reasons to be smiling these days.

After leaving school, the Geelong teenager received specialised employment supports, funded through the NDIS.

The supports led Priscilla to a positive new pathway in her life.

She discovered a passion and a talent for working with children – and is getting paid for doing what she loves.

Priscilla now works at the Pipsqueaks Early Learning Centre Lara.

She proudly just completed a TAFE Certificate III in Childcare and hopes to work with children with disability in the future.

'Now that I have my Childcare certificate, I would now like to work with children who have a disability, this is where my passion and heart lie as I want to help them as I was helped,' Priscilla said.

Priscilla now works in the kitchen but has done a range of jobs over the past year, including helping to set up the classroom and yard, and putting sunscreen on the children.

She has enjoyed teaching the kids how to say hello in Tamil.

'I discovered that I love working with kids,' Priscilla says. 'They are wonderful little personalities and communicate well,' she said.

'We have a lot of fun together. They love it when we make silly faces and have a joke with them. They just laugh. I love playing 'superhero' with them.'

Priscilla's supported employment journey was about exploring options, building skills, and finding work that would suit her best.

With the help of NDIS provider genU, Priscilla took part in an extensive 'discovery' process over 12 months.

She developed an action plan, which included goals to gain experience and find employment.

Priscilla took part in several work experience placements in the hospitality industry, which helped to build her general employment skills and knowledge.

She enjoyed learning kitchen hand, customer service and cleaning skills along the way.

This led to 2 days a week of paid employment as a kitchenhand at Pipsqueaks where genU provided Disability Awareness Training to staff.

Before long, Priscilla was a valued member of the team.

'genU helped to find and recommend me for the position with Pipsqueaks and the volunteering has given me some great experiences,' Priscilla said.

'My support workers have always been helpful and encouraging and I feel safe and respected by the staff at work.

'The supports have helped me gain more confidence and to start a different journey in my life.

'I'm happy I can be more independent and achieve what I want to achieve.'

Priscilla continues to be supported through the NDIS with funded employment supports.

genU provides ongoing mentoring and coaching to keep building Priscilla's skills. She also has help with her studies 2 days a week.

Priscilla is learning a range of soft employment skills, such as problem solving, and how to communicate with staff and customers.

'All of these skills are important to ensuring Priscilla maintains her employment,' genU support worker Allison Strauch says.

Priscilla is proudly now at the tail end of a TAFE Certificate III in Childcare.

She says her new skills and confidence have also helped with making new friends.

'My life has changed a lot with the supports from the NDIS,' Priscilla says.

'I'm very happy, I feel a lot more confident in what I'm doing. I feel really happy because I can be with people I feel comfortable with, and I can achieve what I want to achieve.

‘I have new friends who I met at TAFE, and I’m really enjoying my life.’

Priscilla is part of the 97% of participants aged 15 and over who felt happy about the relationships they’ve made with the staff who work with them.

“My support workers have always been helpful and encouraging and I feel safe and respected by the staff at work,” Priscilla said.

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Many NDIS participants, like Priscilla, have had more opportunities to learn new things since entering the Scheme. Latest data shows an increase of 9 per cent for participants aged 15 and over.

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