Posted on:
18 January 2023

After volunteering to work at a local café, Isaiah Tori has proven how competent, dedicated, and charismatic he is, landing himself 2 paid 4-hour shifts a week.

Excited with the outcome, the 18-year-old, who has an intellectual disability and autism, said he loves working at Hervey Bay's Sea Breeze Café and he's never missed a shift.
One of his highlights is when his employers, Shami Sivan and Sneha Patil, let him experiment with milkshake flavours.

"I'm good at making milkshakes," he said proudly. "I always have new ideas for flavours, and I like getting to name them. I like combining 2 flavours to make one. I've made caramel-strawberry and choc-banana. Those flavours go really well together.

"The other day I made a choc-caramel milkshake. When I added the chocolate sauce I could see the swirls, so I named it the Caramel Bar milkshake," he added with a grin.
Mum Katrina Shaw said her son did have some hospitality skills prior to securing his job.

"Isaiah worked at his school's café on Fridays. He learnt how to make coffees, milkshakes, and how to serve customers. That's where it all started and he really enjoyed it," she said.

"When Isaiah left school, his National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) support coordinator, Matthew Breen from Fraser Coast Support Coordination, linked us with Kelsey Deans, a Busy At Work employment support planner here in Hervey Bay.

"Kelsey has just been wonderful. She worked with us to learn all about Isaiah – his skills, likes and dislikes and what work environment we thought would suit him best."

Recent NDIS data indicates Isaiah is one of 97 per cent of NDIS participants aged 15 plus who feel happy about the relationships they've made at work.

With his prior hospitality experience, Isaiah, Kelsey, and Katrina agreed they should explore more "café-type" jobs for Isaiah, so Kelsey supported Isaiah to do a new resume.

"Isaiah and I also talked about how to address employers – how and what to say and how to explain what he was looking for. Then we did some cold calls, and I took Isaiah around to several cafes so he could hand in his resume," Kelsey said.

"We came across Sea Breeze Café and its former owner was happy to give Isaiah a start. We were all so excited.

"Isaiah volunteered there for a few months to build his skills then when the café sold and Shami and Sneha took over they kept Isaiah on."

Kelsey said part of her role is to regularly check in with employers to see how participants are going.

“When I checked in with Shami and Sneha they were really impressed with Isaiah and how hard he was working, but they said they felt sad he wasn’t getting paid so they asked if they could pay him. It was amazing to hear.”

Reflecting, Shami and Sneha said they felt it was the right thing to do.
“Everyone is equal,” Shami said. “If you’re working hard and doing a great job, why shouldn’t you get paid.”

Now master of the milkshakes, Shami and Sneha say Isaiah has really grown since they started working with him and he’s shown initiative in other areas of their business too.

“He’s prepping and serving food, taking orders and payments. He’s even steaming milk to make hot chocolates, something I never taught him to do,” Sneha added.
“It shows Isaiah has initiative. He can be independent, and he knows what to do.”

Isaiah is one of several participants who say the NDIS is enabling them to enjoy greater independence when it comes to making decisions about their lives. NDIS data identified 69 per cent of participants over 15 said the NDIS has given them more choice and control.

Popular with staff and customers, his friendly manner has been great for their tip jar too.

“He’s so good at customer service,” Sneha said. “He says, “Welcome to Sea Breeze Café. Can I take your order,” and when customers leave, he says, “Have a nice day.”

As for advice to other employers about hiring people with disability, Shami said, “We all have to start somewhere, so why not give people a chance.”

“This opportunity has enabled Isaiah to become more independent, explore his abilities and contribute to his community socially and economically just like anyone else.”

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