Amy’s kaleidoscope of colour combines with NDIS support to create the life she wants

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Throughout her schooling life Amy felt like an outcast, forever questioning whether something was “wrong” with her.

But since being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in 2019 and gaining access to the NDIS, the 22-year-old from Dalveen in Queensland’s Southern Downs region is on a journey of self-discovery and loving it.

“Before I met my support worker, Jane, I didn’t have any friends, I couldn’t drive and I was just socially awkward,” Amy said.

“But together, we worked on my social skills and had regular outings together. We would just get lunch and sit at the park or work on a garden together, it gave me someone else to talk to and slowly she would push me to try new things.”

Amy, who also lives with Tourette syndrome, was severely bullied at school.

In an act of self-preservation, she learned how to hide her uniqueness and tried to blend in with her surroundings and peers.

“I didn’t know anyone like me, I just felt like an outcast, like something was wrong. I was able to hide it pretty well, but I definitely was having trouble for a long time,” Amy said.

Amy’s mother Susan said as her daughter hit the teenager years, she started to notice things change, with Amy struggling socially and with friendships.

Once she completed school, Susan said Amy spent most of her time at home in her room, becoming increasingly isolated.

However, life for Amy began to change after a peer support group in Stanthorpe suggested the family consider applying for the NDIS.

Amy found the support she needed to pursue her goals, with help from NDIS Partner in the Community, Carers Queensland.

“Amy’s first goal was to get out of the house and become more involved in the community, as well as meeting like-minded people,” Susan said.

“Jane is just amazing, and her support meant Amy could start doing things such as buying a sandwich at the counter.

She encouraged her to do this every week and each time it got easier.

“With Jane’s encouragement, Amy also learned how to go to the shops by herself, and they visited antique stores together looking at old stuff.”

Amy is one of many participants who have discovered the NDIS is helping them have the independence to make more decisions in their lives.

For participants aged over 15, 69 per cent say the NDIS is giving them more choice and control.

Amy and Jane’s trips to vintage stores ignited a spark in Amy, who started to take an interest in history.

This led Amy to try her hand at drawing, in particular, creating medieval style tattoos.

“I’ve become a lot more independent since Jane came into my life and I feel more able to do things by myself, without the need to hold someone’s hand all the time,” Amy said.

While describing the experience of sitting for her driver’s licence as “terrifying”, Amy can now drive herself around town and to her job at Granite Ink in Stanthorpe.

“Jane encouraged me to go to the art group at the tattoo store in town and I’ve become good friends with the owners and they offered me a job. I’ve been working there since April,” Amy said.

Amy is among 97 per cent of participants aged 15 and over happy with the staff who work with them.

The aspiring tattoo artist boasts a colourful and eclectic array of tattoos herself, with Amy saying getting inked has been a part of her healing process.

“It’s like having art and a story on your skin. Over the years I’ve had some body image issues but having tattoos on my body has helped me reclaim it,” she said.

Amy has just enrolled in a Bachelor of Religion and Ancient History, doing one subject per semester, and she credits her NDIS-funded support worker with helping her to gain the confidence to study.

Participants are increasingly getting opportunities to learn new things, and complete year 12.

In addition, participants are less likely to say there was a course or training they wanted to do in the last 12 months but could not.

Susan said while it had taken Amy time to work out who she was, Jane had been the catalyst for encouraging Amy to pursue what she loves through history and art.

“There was a period of time when I thought Amy would never be able to live alone, that she would be dependent on us forever. But thanks to the NDIS, hope has come back into our lives,” she said.

“As long as she has NDIS supports in place, she can do anything she puts her mind to.”

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