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Greenvale’s Tobias Ward-Boas said he couldn’t wipe the smile off his face when he received a call to say he’d landed a job with the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability (VALID).

The 21-year-old said his NDIS funding and his new role at VALID have been life changing and so far, “life is pretty good”.

“At VALID my role is to empower self-advocacy for people with disability, develop training tools, information/resources and help plan the annual Having a Say (HaS) conference.

"As a person with autism I want to use my lived experience to help support others,” he said.

Working one day a week at VALID’s Collingwood office, Tobias is sent out to visit several people with lived experience of intellectual disability at their homes to capture data and improve self-advocacy and empowerment practices within their accommodation service.

“It’s great to be able to visit people with disabilities in their homes and ask them questions about their supports and whether they are working for them or not,” he said.

“I ask them a range of questions, like do they make their own choices at home and if so, do their staff help them to make those choices happen.

“If they say no, they’re not getting the help they need, we record this and give recommendations to the service on how they can improve.

"I really enjoy this type of work.

"I feel like I’m helping to make a positive difference in people with disability’s lives,” he said.

Not sure what he wanted to do after leaving school, Tobias said it was his brother William who got him involved with VALID, initially to help out as a volunteer.

“At the time William was working for VALID, helping to set up the HaS conference.

"He asked me if I’d like to volunteer to help.

"I said 'sure why not', so I went along,” Tobias said.

“That’s when I meet the team for the first time, Rick, Sara, and Anthony and all the others.

"William and I helped them to set up the conference.

"We all had a great time, so I decided to continue helping them out.”

Tobias admits after completing his Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), a Cert IV in Youth Work, being a part of consultations and some mental health research facilitated by Jon Slingsby from VALID and working with people with disabilities, he wasn't sure where his experience would lead him workwise.

"Being a person with disability, things were evolving around that, but then when my brother saw a position advertised at VALID, he said 'Why don't you apply?'

"I thought 'Why not'.

"I applied and that's how I got here.

"I feel extremely privileged to be in this role," he said.

VALID Self Advocacy Programs manager, Rick Ruiu said Tobias has settled in quickly and taken on an active role in the team.

"Tobias is a quick learner, always approachable; he joins in and he's a really nice person in terms of how he conducts himself in and out of the office," he said.

"Tobias is also a natural when it comes to conducting interviews.

"He's very animated and he always tries to get the best out of people.

"He's doing really well and he's someone we are thrilled to have on our team," Rick said.

Recent NDIS Annual Participant and Family and Carer Outcomes reports show Tobias is one of many NDIS participants who say their life has improved with NDIS supports.

The reports also show after 5 years there's been a 42 per cent increase in the number of participants aged 15 years and over who say they are satisfied with their life.

Like Tobias many participants over 15 say they are now more independence and have the ability to choose how they spend their free time – almost a one third increase in agency data.

The NDIS provides support to over 573,000 Australians, with more than half receiving supports for the first time.

Tobias is one of over 153,000 Victorians benefitting from the NDIS.

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