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A comfort zone is a place unfamiliar to disability and women’s rights advocate, writer, editor and now actor, Hannah Diviney.

‘Being nervous is a good thing and if something doesn’t make you nervous, then you’re in the wrong place,’ Hannah said.

That may explain the latest venture for Hannah, 23, who last year went viral on Twitter after convincing superstars Lizzo and Beyonce to ‘do better’ and change their ableist song lyrics.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme participant is currently on the Gold Coast filming Audrey, her first full-length feature film.

It is the first time the 2022 Young Australian of the Year nominee, who lives with cerebral palsy, will be away from her family in Sydney for an extended period, so she can chase her acting goals.

‘As so many people would know, the representation of disabled actors is few and far between,’ Hannah said.

‘So, even though it was a childhood dream, I doubted I would get much work because if I ever saw disabled characters on screen, which was rare, they were always being played by able-bodied actors.

‘That made me feel frustrated and invisible.

‘I saw that as people wearing my identity like a costume they could cast off as soon as the director yelled “cut”.’

During the 6-week shoot for Audrey, Ascend Health Group will provide physiotherapy and support work services to Hannah as part of her NDIS Plan.

Ascend Health Group chief executive, Zach Nielsen, says he jumped at the chance to offer support to Hannah and have a physiotherapist working with her on set.

‘When I met Hannah, I asked about her NDIS plan, and her needs, and how we could build on that,’ Zach said.

‘We found we could have a highly qualified person helping Hannah meet her needs through the NDIS so that she can work.

‘This is about inclusion, not just in a social setting, but inclusion in the economy as well.’

The movie follows on from the success of last year’s SBS short-form drama series Latecomers, in which Hannah played a leading role.

It will be the only Australian entry to feature in the Series Mania Festival in France, in March, which celebrates the best in world television.

Hannah, whose NDIS supports include help with self-care and personal domestic activities, as well as capacity-building therapies such as physio, read the Audrey script at the request of the producers after they were able to see an early screener of Latecomers.

‘Norah’s character was originally written for a disabled actor with mobility,’ producer Michael Wrenn said, ‘but when we saw Hannah’s star turn in Latecomers it was clear we had found our actor and would need to work with her to revise the role to her abilities.’

The movie is a dramedy about a mother who assumes the role of her daughter, Audrey, who ends up in a coma after a fall, and tests the family dynamic with Hannah playing her sister, Norah.

‘And I’m sure, in future, when people see Hannah’s acting ability, they will be writing roles specifically with her in mind.’

Hannah is passionate about giving an avenue for young women to tell their stories through her global media company Missing Perspectives, which she co-founded in 2021.

She is also known for her campaign in urging Disney to create an animated Princess with disabilities and to include disabled characters in its films.

‘We’ve made some progress, but we’ve also got a long way to go,’ Hannah said.

Audrey, a Screen Australia and Screen Queensland-funded project, with support from the MIFF Premiere Fund is due to premiere in Australia in August 2024 at the Melbourne International Film Festival following its international premiere.

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