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When it comes to providing customers with a stunning lawn, award-winning West Australian gardener Will Anthony is cutting edge.

Will, 20, from Broome, has overcome employment barriers typical for people living on the autism spectrum.

The success of his lawn mowing micro enterprise, Will’s World, has led to a state disability employment award, announced last month in Perth.

At the WA National Disability Services’ Disability Support Awards, Will’s World was nominated for 4 categories and won the gong for Excellence in Supporting Employment Outcomes.

“It was a great night to be alive,” Will said. “There was lots of singing and dancing going on.” Will’s disability support worker for the past 6 years, Nathan Allaway, is amazed at how Will has prospered since becoming a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participant in 2018.

“When you’re around Will, you’re in Will’s World,” Nathan said. “Spend 20 minutes with him and you’ll know that he’s a unique character.

“Will’s World is not just about a gardening business. Through social media, we want to share Will’s challenges and the steps we take to overcome them. We hope he will encourage others to improve their own lives.”

After several discussions with support co-ordinator Clare Gibellini, from NDIS-registered provider Valued Lives, Will’s World was born.

“A lot of people would have written Will off, but he’s an incredible human,” Clare said. “The award proves it’s Will’s time to shine.

”Will puts a pep in people’s step. I tell Will’s story to other planners, as well as families with children on the spectrum, to show what is possible.

“All people with disability have the right to live the lives of their choosing, and that’s what Will is doing.”

With Will’s passion for machinery, gardening and the outdoors, it quickly became clear that he might be good at mowing lawns.

“The timing was great because it proved to be a good transition for Will from school to the workplace,” Nathan said.

“From there, the NDIS opened a lot more doors for Will.

“Valued Lives helped us with the business plan, initially, and then through a small grant we bought some equipment.

“These days, Will is buying his equipment through all the hard work he does.”

With help from Nathan, Will is steadily building his capacity and is gradually expanding his business from mowing lawns to more complex garden maintenance jobs.

“Apart from being there onsite with Will, part of my role is to set up his jobs for the day,” Nathan said.

“Quite often, I’ll plan 2 scenarios and give him a choice. Will likes to feel in control of things as much as possible. My job is to facilitate that.

“It’s all about building Will’s capacity, so now we can do larger jobs where he can grow his skills and grow his business.”

Last year, social media consultant Jasmine Hornby joined the team to help tell Will’s story. “My role was to share Will’s story on social media, something he is very passionate about,” Jasmine said. “He calls his followers ‘fans’.

“Will loves to show what he is capable of to a wider audience. With Will’s support network in place, the message is that, if it’s possible for him, it’s possible for others.”

Jasmine’s work is paying off. Within a few months, Will has doubled his following on Facebook, with more than 800 ‘fans’. His social media videos have received more than 480,000 views.

Nathan says Will and his family are grateful for their NDIS support - from Perth-based Valued Lives to local support organisation Kimberley Care Group - which has been vital in the success of Will’s World.

“Without the NDIS, I don’t think Will’s World would have been possible,” Nathan said.

“To have multiple providers involved and all working cohesively is exactly what the NDIS is all about.

“The NDIS really needs to be nurtured and looked after going forward so it can create more opportunities for people like Will.”

The NDIS is now providing support to more than 573,000 Australians, with more than half receiving supports for the first time.

Will is one of more than 49,000 in Western Australia benefitting from the NDIS. He is one of almost 200,000 participants nationally who have listed autism as their primary disability. April is World Autism Awareness Month.

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