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Ulverstone NDIS participant Chelsea Firth is being supported to learn skills to help her achieve her chosen career, cabinet making.

In her final years of school, the now 19-year-old, who has autism, was able to use her NDIS employment assistance funding to engage disability provider Multicap Tasmania to help her transition to work.

Quietly spoken, Chelsea said she enjoys woodwork, and she developed an interest in it at school.

‘There’s something about the smell of wood and the feel of it. I really love learning how to make different things from it,’ she said.

Now with support from youth employment coach Tania Smith, Chelsea is able to access weekly woodwork classes at a local Ulverstone Woodcraft Hub not far from her home.

‘I go there with Tania once a week. I really enjoy it,’ Chelsea said.

‘I’ve made some chairs, some little boxes to put things in and a toolbox for myself. I also made a rattle tower toy, shaped like a bird cage, for my little brother Brodie. He’s 2.’

At the Woodcraft Hub Chelsea is also supported to learn to manage other vital workplace tasks.

‘Once a month I’m rostered on to open up the hub,’ she said. ‘I go in, turn everything on, count the float and go outside to check the 2 dust collector bags from the ventilation system and replace the bags if they are full.

‘I also greet customers, tell them about all the stock we sell and help them with any purchases.’

Tania said with all the support Chelsea has received her confidence and her work and life skills have really improved.

‘Chelsea is always the first one to greet people when they walk in the door and ask if they need any help. This once quite shy young woman is certainly coming out of her shell,’ she said.

‘Chelsea is also remembering the routine of all the jobs she has to do and her attention to detail is absolutely amazing.

‘She checks her work. She’s very precise with things. She even checks her woodwork down to a 10th of a millimetre. It’s high quality. She’s just blossoming. It’s fantastic to see,’ Tania said.

Chelsea said having support to attend the Woodcraft Hub and to increase her work and people skills has really ‘spurred’ her on to secure a cabinet making job.

‘Tania and I have talked about how doing all these extra tasks is helping me to build my skills and confidence. Then I’ll be able to look at doing a TAFE pre-apprenticeship course in cabinet making or even start to apply for cabinet making apprenticeships,’ she said.

Also funded for occupational therapy (OT) Chelsea said her OT Ric has been a great support too.

‘Ric and I meet regularly. He’s been helping me with my resume. We’ve been updating it with everything I’m doing. It’s great to have that support,’ she said.

Tania firmly believes the key ingredients here for young people with disability to become job ready is networking and collaboration.

‘When Ric and I worked out Chelsea’s individualised support program we divided it into 3 areas.

‘One was job seeking, including resume building and looking at the types of support Chelsea could get if she did a TAFE course or an apprenticeship.

‘Then we looked at skill acquisition – all of the skills Chelsea has, and those she needs to work in her chosen field.

‘Then there’s the general skills she requires – travel training, catching buses, customer service skills, money management, time management,’ Tania said.

While Chelsea is not quite ready to tackle a TAFE course or an apprenticeship, she continues to explore her options and build her skills and confidence.

‘Watching Chelsea network with others has just been fabulous. Preparing her to succeed is key and I know she’ll continue to work hard to achieve her goal,’ Tania said.

‘NDIS employment assistance has been so beneficial for Chelsea. I would encourage all parents of young people with disability to talk to their child’s NDIS planner and make sure it’s included in their plan.

‘This support is person-centred. We identify and work to each young person’s strengths then build on any areas they might need help with so they can achieve their goals.

‘If their goals change we still have the flexibility to continue working with them on their employment journey, supporting them to do whatever it is they want to do,’ Tania said.

‘Seeing Chelsea continue to develop and the huge smile on her face each week is priceless.’

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