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A blind chef who is fighting back from cancer is the star ingredient of a children’s book that urges young people with a disability to chase their dreams.

Craig, 32, of Penrith, spent the past 15 years working in some of Sydney’s finest restaurants before establishing his own award-winning eatery, The Blind Chef Café and Dessert Bar, in 2020.

Last year, the NDIS participant joined with Vision Australia to publish a children’s book about his life, Cooking up a Storm.

At the age of 2, doctors removed Craig’s left eye after he was diagnosed with rhabdomyosarcoma, an aggressive form of cancer.

Managing his education with a vision impairment was a challenge Craig happily took on until he found his calling in life.

‘By the time I was in Year 10, I discovered my passion for cooking,’ Craig said.

‘I wanted to get an apprenticeship but I had a few challenges with the fact I had one eye.

‘Some employers thought I’d be unsafe working in a kitchen environment.

‘But they didn’t know me and didn’t know what I was capable of.’

After a completing a TAFE course in commercial cookery, Craig landed an apprenticeship at a local Italian restaurant.

‘Getting my foot in the door was the hardest part,’ Craig said. ‘Once I got the job, I had no problems getting future employment.’

However, just as his career was taking off, Craig suffered another major setback.

In 2014, Craig’s cancer had returned, damaging the optic nerve in his right eye. After surgery, he was left with 6% of his vision.

Craig became an NDIS participant 2 years later and began to use his supports so he could return to the kitchen.

Craig completed phone and computing courses for people who are blind or vision impaired, as well as learning to walk using a white cane.

From there, Craig completed a Diploma and an Advanced Diploma in Hospitality Management before opening The Blind Chef Café and Dessert Bar in Penrith.

'Owning my own café was always a dream but it was also a practical solution to getting myself into work again,' Craig said.

'There was not much work out there for a legally blind chef. So, I decided to open up an inclusive café, a place where anyone could feel welcome.'

Craig's NDIS plan includes funding for a support worker, weekly physiotherapy and a screen reader.

'The NDIS has helped me achieve my goals. My support worker, who comes 3-4 days a week, helps me with transport to medical and social appointments. They also help me to navigate hospitals and other tricky places,' Craig said.

'There is also a lot less stress on my family. I live with my mother. She was driving me to all of my appointments. That affected her ability to work.'

With his NDIS supports in place, Craig's café thrived, and last year he was awarded the Blind Australian of the Year Employer of Choice award.

Not-for-profit organisation Vision Australia heard about Craig's success and asked him to feature in its Big Vision book series, sold online and through Big W. The book is also available in braille.

However, despite initial success the café closed earlier this year after a pre-existing heart condition landed Craig in hospital.

In January, Craig had a heart transplant and was managing the café from his bedside.

'I had no chefs, I had to put a team together while I was in hospital and do all the ordering,' Craig said.

Months later, doctors found the brain tumour that first sent Craig blind had returned for a third time. On 5 June, Craig had surgery to remove the tumour and is now in recovery.

'I'm not someone who normally gives up, but it was just becoming a bit too hard to run the café,' Craig said. 'I hadn't even had time to do rehab from the heart transplant.

'So, we decided to shut the doors. But you never know, we'll see what happens in the future. I might do a food truck, so I could cater at events for disability groups.'

While still in recovery, Craig says he plans on cooking up a storm again in the near future.

‘For me, it’s just about chasing your dream,’ Craig said. ‘If someone knocks you back, or says “you can’t do something”, well, that’s not the end of it.

‘There’s help out there. It was a challenge to do the café, but I kept pushing on. Keep finding other ways to achieve your goals.’

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