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Launceston’s Melissa Sutczak said now there’s a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Australians with disability are much better placed to be supported in the workplace and to enjoy more fulfilling careers.

The wife and mum of one, who is deaf, says the supports she has received through her NDIS plan and inclusive employers has been life-changing, personally, and professionally.

‘From my experience employers are willing to adapt their workplaces,’ Melissa said.

‘I think the tide is turning and I encourage people to see what supports the NDIS can offer so they can work towards and fulfil their career goals.

‘I did. For the first time I had reliable hearing aids. It meant I could take calls and even connect with family long distance,’ Melissa said.

‘I also received a few other pieces of assistive technology to support me at work and each employer has been happy to accommodate my needs. My experience has been amazing.’

Melissa said her biggest goal was to keep working full-time. Now she can.

‘If I take my hearing aids out, I am profoundly deaf. The technology I’ve received has just been life changing,’ she said.

‘Prior to the NDIS I couldn’t even make phone calls. I avoided them. I hated them with a passion. Now it’s so easy, my hearing aids connect via

Bluetooth to my iPhone. I just press a little button at the side and say, ‘Hi. Mel speaking’ and away I go.’

Melissa also has a Roger Pen. It’s a small device she can hold, wear, or place in the centre of a table when she’s in a meeting. It picks up a person's voice sending it straight to her hearing aids. It also removes background noise so Melissa can hear clearly.

Prior to the NDIS Melissa said she faced several challenges without the right equipment.

‘When I first started work there was no funding for me. Money was scarce. I had no other choice but to take out personal loan after personal loan to pay for my hearing aids and other equipment to support me to work,’ she said.

‘My hearing aids would constantly break. They weren’t doing their job. I’m so grateful my NDIS plan covers their cost and any repairs.’

Able to progress her career with the right supports, Melissa loves her current job.

‘I’ve gone from waitressing back in the day to being a support worker. Now I’m a Multicap Tasmania team leader. I supervise staff and participants in the Community Access Tamar Street Hub in Launceston. I also step in as acting manager at times,’ she said.

‘I love working in the disability sector. My colleagues and clients are great and the support I’ve had from management is second to none.

‘I’d like people to know I’ve come across several inclusive employers, so if you’ve got the skills and knowledge, and you’re upfront in your interview about the supports you need to do the job, you may be pleasantly surprised.’

Melissa said she remembers years ago she went for a waitressing job.

‘I was very forthcoming in my interview. I had experience, but I was hard of hearing,’ she said.

‘I explained how good I would be at the job and how as an employer, they could support me to do the job well.

‘I said I had a pager I could wear on my belt at work. Then if they paged me from the kitchen or installed a light to go off above the kitchen door, it would work.

‘I knew what I needed to help me do the job. They were open to it, so they hired me,’ Melissa said.

‘Now when I assist with interviews, I prefer people to be upfront about their support needs so as an inclusive employer, we can understand their needs and properly support them.

‘People need to remember your disability doesn’t define you. It’s your skills, knowledge, and you as a person. If you’re the right fit for the job, you’ll get it,’ Melissa added.

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