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Caleb Henderson is making his way in the world and taking on the challenge of working as a shift runner at a large fast food chain outlet.

‘It's not quite a manager's role, but we are supervisors and we run the shifts when there is no manager working,’ Caleb says.

The job carries some responsibility. Shift runners maintain the speed of service, the quality of food, and make sure customers are treated with respect.

‘It’s stressful, but I'm definitely learning a lot along the way,’ Caleb says.

Caleb is a 23 year old Port Lincoln local who lives with autism.

‘The autism affects the way I communicate. I get anxiety making friends and trying to work out what to say and what not to say,’ Caleb says.

‘The employment support I received definitely helped with that, but I still struggle a bit. It’s a work in progress.’

Caleb’s employment assistance was funded by the NDIS.

‘I believe NDIS employment support helped me get to the point where I am at now,’ Caleb says.

Support workers identified Caleb’s strengths, and areas where Caleb could improve to prepare him for employment.

For example, Caleb had excellent maths skills, but found reading and writing more difficult.

‘The rules of maths do not change. But there are so many exceptions to the rules of reading and writing,’ Caleb says.

‘I found that difficult, but employment support helped me.’

Doing work experience was an important part of preparing Caleb for life after school.

One of Caleb’s goals was to explore what it would be like to be a student support officer at a school. Student support officers help both teachers and students.

Caleb was placed into student support officer work experience positions at Port Lincoln Primary and Junior Primary Schools.

‘My support worker at that time was actually my student support officer when I was at school, so he really helped me understand what to expect,’ Caleb says.

‘We had a great connection. And he had a passion for playing guitar, like me, so he got me back on track to playing more.’

Caleb’s own experience at school made him well suited to help students.

‘At the junior primary school I worked in the mainstream classes and also in the learning centre for kids who live with disability. That was the same class I was in so I was helping the kids go through what I had gone through,’ Caleb says.

‘It was a challenge, but definitely a joy as well.

‘When I worked as a student support officer I learned that everybody who lives with a disability is different.

‘Everybody works differently and understands things differently.’

Caleb says employment support helped him understand how different life would be after he left school. It also gave him the confidence to find a job and succeed in his current role.

‘The support workers helped me prepare for the big change from being at school to being employed,’ Caleb says.

‘School is literally just a playground you are in with other students. After school you’re in the wide open world.’

‘They’re 2 completely different environments and I think my NDIS employment support prepared me for that difference.’

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