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In a few short years Jayelan Lee, of Perth, has gone from being underestimated at school, to presenting to international audiences.

His world has opened up after years of being unable to express his thoughts verbally.

Jayelan, 19, is on the autism spectrum. He also has severe body and speech apraxia, affecting his ability to carry out physical movements required for speech. This means Jayelan can only speak a few words.

As a child, people assumed Jayelan could not understand them. But he understood everything.

Since he was 11, Jayelan has expressed himself by spelling out words on a letterboard, with letters on one side and numbers on the other. Jayelan's communication partner gives him a voice by reading out his spelled-out sentences.

During his early school years, prior to the NDIS, an allied health worker incorrectly assessed Jayelan as having an intellectual disability when accessing support for him.

As a result, Jayelan was educated at a level far below his capability.

'Life at school before I was 11 was horrible,' Jayelan says.

'Sitting in a class learning academic material that was far too easy for me was torture.'

Now he's defying early expectations and emerging as an advocate for people living with autism.

Jayelan is achieving his career goals through youth employment support, funded through his NDIS plan.

Jayelan's limited verbal ability makes his achievement even more impressive because as an advocate, he delivers presentations to audiences.

When Jayelan was introduced to the letterboard, it was a turning point.

'Things were so much better when I started communicating on the letter board,' Jayelan says.

'It felt great to finally access the appropriate education level.'

Another turning point came when Jayelan's mother, Aemy, learned about the customised employment approach. This involves identifying participants' passions, interests, and skills, and matching them to employment options and career paths.

'I attended a full day customised employment workshop at APM Australia, with Jayelan's support worker,' Aemy says.

Together, Aemy and Jayelan's support worker, who was funded through Jayelan's NDIS youth employment support, guided Jayelan through the discovery phase of the customised employment approach.

They matched Jayelan's capabilities and interests with his goal of becoming an advocate for people who live with autism.

'We closely followed the guidelines. It was good that we had that template on paper,' Aemy says.

'It helped us get into the details and put our thinking caps on.'

When Jayelan was in year 12 his school partnered with a disability service provider to give students customised employment services, carrying Jayelan further through the process.

During this time Jayelan had an employment mentor.

'She is an experienced presenter and gave Jayelan a whole new understanding of the world of advocacy,' Aemy says.

Now Jayelan has another employment mentor through Microenterprise Launchpad, funded through his NDIS employment support.

'The employment mentor is teaching me the language of advocacy,' Jayelan says.

'She also helps me with developing a business plan, teaches me how to present pre-prepared speeches, and how to liaise with event organisers.'

When Jayelan presents to audiences, his communication partner reads out content he has pre-prepared.

Then Jayelan uses the letterboard to answer questions from the audience. His responses are also read out by his communications partner.

Jayelan recently travelled to University Malaysia Sabah, where he delivered his Silent World Of Autism presentation to the Sabah Autism Society.

‘I hope that by sharing my story I was able to give hope to parents in Malaysia with non-verbal autistic kids,’ Jayelan says.

Jayelan acknowledges NDIS employment support as an important part of his career development.

‘I would definitely recommend NDIS participants utilise employment support funding to explore meaningful employment options,’ Jayelan says.

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