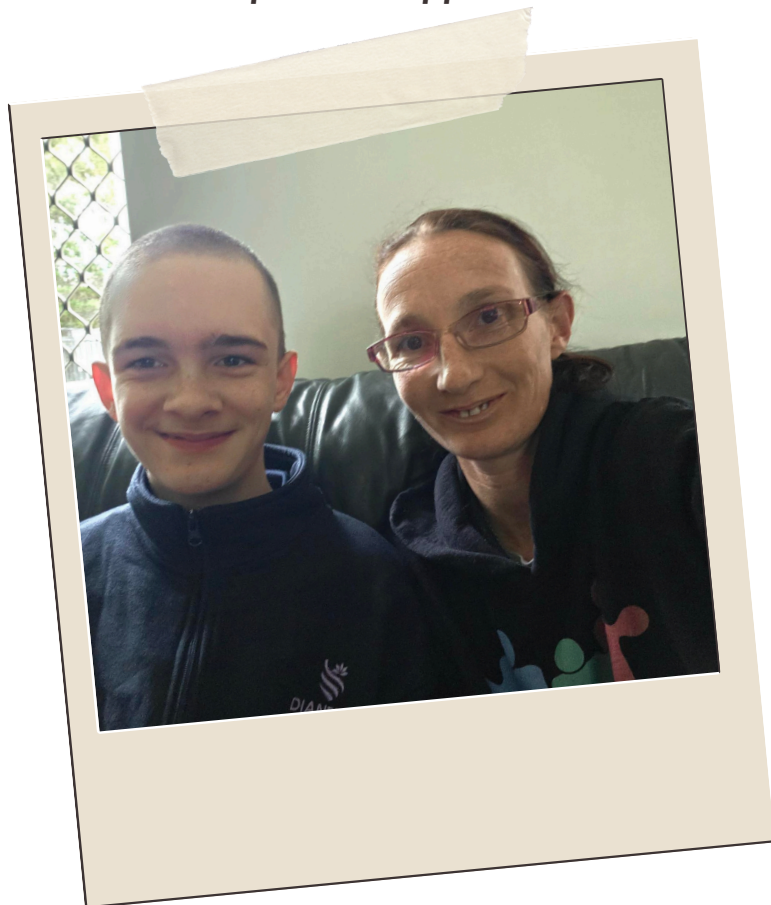


Spotlight on Support Workers

Meet Steph...

An Advocate for Her Family and the People She Supports



About Steph

I've always wanted to work in aged care or the disability sector. During my job search, I applied for a few jobs online and Unique Support Services gave me a chance, which I am grateful for. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon; I plan to stay with Unique! Support work has been incredibly helpful, especially in giving me on-the-job experience that has helped me manage behaviours at home too.

Inside Scoop

In this edition, we shine a light on Steph, one of Unique Support's dedicated support workers, who reminds us why advocacy matters. For Steph, it's not just part of her role, it's personal. As a mum to a son living with disability and a passionate advocate for participants, she has seen how powerful it is when people are given a voice. From helping her son overcome bullying to supporting participants in making their own choices, Steph embodies Unique Support's commitment to empowering lives. Her story shows that advocacy isn't just support, it's about creating change, building confidence, and ensuring no one is ever left unheard.

What personal values guide the way you support people with disabilities, and how do those values show up in your daily work?

I believe people with disabilities need someone to advocate for them, having support workers from Unique or even just family members as advocates helps them get the most out of life. Without that kind of support, I don't know where people with disabilities would be.

My son lives with a disability which means that needs assistance to cope in social settings, he sometimes struggles emotionally, particularly when interacting with peers. He has experienced bullying, which is sadly common for many people living with disabilities. Advocacy is important as it means to fight for what is right.

Can you share a time when you advocated for someone and what difference it made in their life?

I have seen big changes in participants when they have strong advocacy. Through strong advocacy, one of my participants is much more settled; she communicates better and seems a lot happier.

My son has also made great progress in his social and emotional development, because of the advocacy I carried on, on his behalf. Making a new friend after feeling so defeated is a big step for him. Having witnessed my son's transformation, I am more convinced that advocacy is an integral part of the NDIS world we now live in. Without advocacy, damage can be inflicted in a vulnerable person's life. The extra support is beneficial and can assist to manage their lives and to be an active part of their community.

Advocacy is what helps people who have been silenced to communicate and to have their voices heard; whether is a participant who does not use words to communicate for example or oppressed and marginalised groups of people.

How do you ensure that the voices of the people you support are truly heard and respected, especially in decision-making about their own lives?

I work alongside a young lady with complex needs, I support her to make her own decisions, for example, helping her make phone calls to the office and make changes to her roster. Even though she has a disability, she has the right to make her own choices. I always follow up on her requests and make sure they are respected.

It is often a temptation to do things for participants; however, I always assume capacity and focus on what I can do in my role to be able to live an empowered life. I will add that this participant only uses a few words and therefore, giving her the time and space to think and act on her decisions is something she treasures.



What does advocacy mean to you personally, and what kind of future do you hope it creates for people with disabilities?

To me, advocacy means giving people the chance to grow and develop, as well as enable the recipient to reach their full potential. I hope advocacy becomes more widely known and accessible, because a lot of people still don't know what it is. People who need support often struggle to speak up because they are vulnerable. Either they have no confidence or do not know where to start. Advocacy gives people a way to share their views, thoughts, and concerns.

I just want people to know never give up on advocacy, whether it's for participants or your own family. Change can happen. It just takes time and fierce commitment to the outcome you desire!

Stay tuned for more inspiring stories from the people who make Unique Support, unique.

From your experience, what changes have you seen in participants' confidence, independence, or wellbeing as a result of strong advocacy?

Personally, I have had to advocate a lot for my son, especially at school. We have had serious issues with bullying and even assault, which led us to change schools multiple times. It has taken constant emails, phone calls, visits to the office, and even police involvement. But now, he is thriving. He has made some friends, and it's amazing to see how far he has come. The school has since put safety plans in place, and we have seen his behaviour improve. He is enjoying life more.