

John's beekeeping background helps keep local bar buzzing

With one of the best rooftop bars in the city, the Coconut Grove in Northbridge is certainly at cruising altitude for the city's bees. To get the venue buzzing, John's not only been helping to prepare public areas for opening to customers but has used his experience helping his dad keep bees to decide what plants to add to the garden areas that gives bees a great stopover.



John and some of his team L-R: Alex (Assistant Manager), John (Yardperson), Ricardo (Venue Manager)

Finding a great job fit

A bright and active person, John sees his autism as less of a disability and more of a trait that he turns into a positive. While he previously worked in a retail role at a national hardware store, it wasn't something he enjoyed or could see himself doing in the long term. But by drawing upon a successful hospitality placement he'd completed at secondary school, he redirected his efforts to get into the hospitality industry. Now working as a Yardperson at Coconut Grove for more than a year, he's thriving in a role and industry he enjoys.

A typical shift sees John resetting the venue from the weekending, which includes ensuring all areas and furniture are clean and well-maintained. He also receives goods inwards and stores stock in preparation for



opening. But there's often many other tasks to complete, including gardening, setting up or packing down functions, and additional cleaning.

In his spare time, John keeps bees with his dad – a skill that's proven useful at Coconut Grove. A great example is one of his projects that involved planting greenery at the venue and re-bedding the palm trees. He says he 'really enjoyed gardening to contribute to pollination for the bees.'

An employer who sees beyond disability

Venue Manager Ricardo and Assistant Manager Alex both demonstrate the difference an employer can make by having an attitude that looks beyond disability. Ricardo believes in 'just giving everyone a go' and 'if we can hire someone who wants to be here and is reliable and turns up it's beneficial to business and to those that have not previously had the opportunity to show people what they can do'.

Being part of a team and learning new skills has been of big benefit to John. He's learnt how to achieve a high standard of cleaning at a hospitality venue, improved his communication skills, and manages his work effectively by writing tasks down so he remembers them. He enjoys 'contributing and being productive and part of a bigger team.' This work ethic is noticed: 'It's refreshing to see someone who takes pride in what they are doing,' says Ricardo.

As with HDNWA's experience with other employers, it's the employee's attitude that trumps their initial skill level, which can be developed with the right guidance. It's clear that John's embraced his role at Coconut Grove. 'John brings a refreshing attitude, is always happy to come to work and is reliable. He shows pride in his work and is very detail orientated. I know that when I give him a task it's always finished to a high standard,' says Ricardo.

HDNWA providing support all the way

Staffed by a team with hospitality backgrounds, HDNWA knows how to make the recruitment and onboarding process as smooth as possible for both employers and candidates. Says Ricardo of HDNWA's support: 'They came and met with me to discuss the new role for the venue and they quickly came back with John. They organised the initial interview, which involved them attending and also supporting John outside of work with feedback that we have provided.'

HDNWA's full service model is what gives our hospitality employer members confidence in the candidates we put forward and the knowledge that we will provide whatever support is needed to make sure their new employee settles in well. For candidates, our pre-screening and interview preparation support means there's no surprises, helping them to relax and put their best foot forward as the step into their new role.

In terms of the future, John is keen to continue his work at Coconut Grove and keep gardening as a natural extension of his knowledge of biodiversity to support bee pollination. He also speaks of the possibility of one day working as a barista in a coffee shop. But whatever path he chooses, HDNWA will be there to connect him to disability confident employers to keep everyone buzzing.