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For Geelong National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participant Tom, home is more than a place to live. It is where he can build skills and take part in everyday life in ways that once felt out of reach.

Tom has high physical needs – low vision, an intellectual disability, cerebral palsy and Ehlers Danlos syndrome, a condition that makes his joints dislocate easily.

His mum Bianca said due to her son's limited functional capacity, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has supported Tom to live in high physical needs Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) and it's been life-changing.

'This house has given Tom things we never thought were possible,' she said.

For the first time ever, Tom could open his own front door.

Bianca said in the past, doorways were too narrow and difficult for Tom to manage in his wheelchair. Now, with more space, larger door handles and a level entrance, he can move straight to the door, reach out and open it himself.

'If someone comes over, Tom goes straight to the front door, opens it and greets them,' she said. 'He loves it. He's so proud this is his house.'

That sense of control has flowed through the rest of the home.

Wider hallways and doorways and no steps mean Tom can move around freely in his manual wheelchair.

Black and white fixtures throughout the home, including larger light switches, help Tom see and use them better.

Sliding doors with larger handles mean he can get a good grip to open them and go through on his own.

'For the first time ever, Tom can move through every part of his home without help,' Bianca said. 'In the past, he couldn't get through doorways. Now he can go wherever he wants!'

The second "first" happened in the kitchen.

Tom had never stood up out of his wheelchair before. But one day, with the kitchen bench set at the right height, he pushed himself up, leaned on the bench and reached into the cupboard to grab a biscuit.

'It was incredible,' Bianca said. 'I never thought that would ever happen. Now he does it all the time.'

The open kitchen space, lower windows and thoughtful design mean Tom can see outside, move around safely and take part in everyday life.

The third "first" is something Bianca said, 'many people take for granted'.

'Tom can finally move through every doorway in his own home in his wheelchair. It may sound simple, but it has opened up his world. It's the first time he's been able to move freely throughout. That independence is everything,' she added.

The home also supports Tom in other ways. Soundproofing ensures noise is limited, level courtyards mean he can go outside whenever he likes and an oversized garage makes transferring him in and out of the car easier and safer.

Tom's bedroom is large, with enough space for him to turn easily in his wheelchair. His bathroom has rails and the right layout to support his needs.

To express himself, Tom uses a communication device. It has symbols he can tap to let people know what he would like to do or what he would like to eat or drink.

'He can tell me what he wants now,' Bianca said. 'That independence is just wonderful.'

Tom uses a whiteboard to plan his week. He chooses activities and lets his support workers know where he would like to go. He enjoys listening to music, playing his keyboard, attending a gardening program and spending time in his community.

Due to his cerebral palsy, keeping Tom mobile is critically important, so he has regular physio and hydro therapies to build and maintain his strength and to keep him injury free.

At home, Tom chooses his clothes, his meals and how he spends his time.

'That's what our real focus has been on - making choices and communication,' Bianca said.

Tom has lived in his home for almost 3 years.

Bianca said while it's been life changing for Tom, it's also been life changing for her.

'I have peace of mind knowing he's safe, happy and living the life he wants,' she said.

'It's also comforting to know the NDIS is supporting Tom to build his skills, so he can live a more inclusive and fulfilling life.'

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