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On Thursday Island, where community, culture and the sea shape everyday life, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participant Charlie is building a future full of confidence, independence and possibility.

Living in a remote Torres Strait Island community, Charlie’s story reflects how the NDIS supports First Nations participants to build independence, participate in their community and pursue their goals.

At 17, Charlie is a wheelchair user with spina bifida and other neurological and physical disabilities. He has used his NDIS supports to strengthen his independence, confidence and life skills.

Before becoming an NDIS participant, everyday tasks and getting around his community were hard. Living remotely created additional barriers, especially as most homes on the island are built high off the ground.

Now, through the NDIS, Charlie can access supports to help him move safely around his home, school and community.

A wheelchair lift was installed at his family home, giving him greater independence. This has allowed him to move in and out more easily and safely.

Charlie also has daily living supports. Each morning before school, his support worker Glenn arrives to help him get ready, helping with personal care and breakfast so he can arrive at school on time.

As Charlie prepares to turn 18 and considers moving to Townsville in the future, his supports are focused on building his practical life skills and confidence.

At a local community hub, he’s learning to wash his clothes, cook healthy meals and manage his day-to-day routine.

What started as simple cooking lessons has become something Charlie genuinely enjoys. He now confidently prepares meals for his family and is making healthier food choices.

‘Charlie loves making food like sushi, tuna and salad wraps, and traditional dishes for his family,’ his program coordinator, Laura, said.

The support Charlie has from the NDIS helps him to improve his strength and fitness and take part in activities he enjoys, including fishing and joining in on cultural activities.

Having supported Charlie for years, Laura said watching his confidence and independence grow from a boy into a young man has been `incredibly rewarding’.

‘Charlie has changed so much,’ she said. ‘He’s become really independent and confident. He is out in the community, making friends and open to trying new things.’

One of Charlie’s biggest milestones came last year when he travelled from Thursday Island to Townsville to compete at the Queensland Representative School Sport Championships.

With careful planning and accessible transport organised by Laura, Charlie was able to attend the championships safely.

His trip became much more than competing in a sporting competition.
Charlie experienced new places, stayed away from home, visited extended family and built confidence in unfamiliar surroundings.

He also returned home with a gold medal in multi-class shot put and a new Australian school record in his category.

While Charlie was humble about the win, his community proudly celebrated alongside him. When he arrived home by ferry, family, friends and even the Torres Shire Council Mayor gathered at the wharf to welcome him.

Charlie’s NDIS supports have helped him explore future career opportunities.

Last year, he travelled to Cairns to do his first block of work experience at two trucking companies.

Laura worked closely with his school to coordinate accessible transport, allowing Charlie to gain hands-on experience in busy workshops. He also learned about truck maintenance, electrical systems, parts and mechanics.

The experience confirmed Charlie’s career goal – to become a diesel fitter or mechanic.

The NDIS has opened doors to a rewarding future.

Whether Charlie is doing work experience, building life skills, training at the gym, competing in sport or spending time with friends, he is building a life defined by confidence, independence and possibility.

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