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About 9 years ago, Mikkel Blignault emerged from high-risk surgery for a brain tumour, unable to talk or move his arms or legs, or even swallow food.

At the same time, doctors also confirmed Mikkel had Huntington's disease—a genetic disorder, which would progressively impact his mobility, his memory and his moods.

Mikkel would have to learn to move and talk again. He spent 18 months in intensive care, and years in rehabilitation.

Until about two years ago, Mikkel was still struggling.

He was isolated and spending most of his time at home alone. He was anxious, he had trouble communicating, and he was nervous about meeting new people or leaving the house.

"I was afraid to go outside the front door because my anxiety was always so high," said Mikkel, 37.

Today, Mikkel is a changed man. He likes to go out most days, sometimes for a coffee, sometimes to the beach. He enjoys playing cards and lawn bowls with friends. He likes to experiment in the kitchen and sometimes cooks up a lasagne for himself and his mates.

He also attends weekly Immersion Therapy sessions with NDIS provider, Determined2 and the service helps him to keep him active and boost his confidence and self-esteem.

Mikkel says his quality of life has improved dramatically—all thanks to the NDIS and the support he receives living in his disability accessible new home, funded through his NDIS plan.

"I needed somewhere to go where I would have more help and it has been fantastic," he said.

After joining the NDIS, Mikkel received Supported Independent Living (SIL) funding, and moved into Briarholme, a state-of the art supported disability accommodation in Kingswood, run by family-owned registered NDIS provider SACARE.

The home, like SACARE's other disability accommodation, is built around an historic character home, decorated to create a welcoming atmosphere for residents and their families, who can visit at any time and hold family celebrations.

Mikkel has his own large room with en-suite and private courtyard, access to the kitchen whenever he wants and can take part in a range of social activities when he chooses.

Support workers provide 24/7 support for whatever Mikkel needs, and also take him out into the community—be it for a coffee, or a day at the football with friends.

“It’s been a real life changer for me,” he said. “Having the support and care of staff and making friends has improved the quality of my life dramatically.

“I try to do things for myself, but if you need help you just have to ask and there is someone always happy to help and to take you out into the community. It is like living in your own home as much as possible.”

Mikkel has made several friends at Briarholme and formed a special bond with close mate Dylan, who, like himself, lives with Huntington’s disease.

“We play a lot of cards, UNO or Monopoly in card form, we play those a lot,” he said. “Sometimes we have coffee or we watch the cricket or football together. It’s really nice to have someone to share those things with.”

After the COVID lockdown, Mikkel was one of the first participants back under water. SACARE and Determined2 worked closely together to ensure Mikkel’s medical certificate was up to date and he had the support he needed to resume the therapy quickly.

“Doing some of the Determined2 Immersion therapy has been really good for my confidence and my self-esteem. I like the sensation of being in the water and it helps me to be calm,” he said.

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