Posted on:
15 February 2021

Only a year ago, Peter Midlan barely had the confidence to speak.

The 42-year-old Aboriginal man from Normanton in the Gulf country region of northwest Queensland spent most of his time alone fishing, afraid to talk to others, especially anyone he didn’t know.

But these days, Peter is a changed man. He’s happy to chat with people, loves catching up with friends to do art or sing, and he’s busy helping others in his local community.

Peter lives with an intellectual disability, which impacts his communication and social skills.

But since the NDIS began supporting Peter four years ago, Peter has gained confidence, increased his independence and become an active and important member of his community.

“Peter had a lot of trouble communicating, he would just freeze, even with people he knew, he didn’t speak at all about a year ago,” said Anthea Amos, Peter’s NDIS-funded support worker with provider, Cootharinga North Queensland.

“He’s made really good progress in the last 12 months. He’s such an awesome man and he just loves working with children and helping out in his community every way he can.”

Peter, who belongs to the Kurtijar Aboriginal group, is still a fervent fisherman and spends most afternoons at the local Norman River angling for something to take home to his extended family for dinner.

But his life has changed dramatically since joining the NDIS.

With help from support workers, Peter has been learning new life skills, socialising more and learning to communicate with others to achieve his goals.

Peter now takes part in a variety of activities that add joy and richness to his own life, as well as the lives of others in his community.

He enjoys volunteering at the Carpentaria Shire Council Local Sports Centre where he often helps supervise children’s activities.

“It’s a good job for me, I watch the kids in the pool and help them do activities,” said Peter.

“I’ll probably take them fishing and help run sausage sizzles and all that, and this year I can take them out camping for a few days.”

Peter is also proud to have recently obtained his bus driver's licence to help transport kids at the sport centre and groups at his local church. He hopes it may one day lead to employment.

"I want to find something different this year that we can do out in the community out there," he said.

As a testimony to his contribution, Peter was honoured for his volunteering work at last year's NAIDOC celebrations. He received an award for his 'outstanding contribution to the Normanton community'.

"I was very happy for that," he said. "It made me feel pretty good and the family was pretty happy."

Peter now socialises regularly and enjoys doing Aboriginal art and music 'with the boys'.

"The NDIS is good. The support workers take me out fishing and I do a lot of activities like painting and we do groups together and social activities. It makes life a bit easier," he said.

Support workers have also helped Peter to build his confidence using the phone and internet and he now independently manages his own finances. He has gained other life skills and can cook for himself and mow the lawn.

"Peter has made progress in many areas of his life," said Jemma Hunt, Peter's former support worker from Cootharinga North Queensland.

"He was too shy to talk to people who were non-Aboriginal and new people and now when he goes fishing, someone might be there we don't know and he might say hello first. It's amazing."

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