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After losing a leg to diabetes in 2008, Alex Fernandez had one thing on his mind – when would he get back on a horse?

And when he lost his other leg seven years later, Alex was even more determined to one day ride again.

“That was a goal for me for 12 years, from the time I lost that first leg,” said Alex, 62, of Derby, Western Australia, who is supported by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

“But all those years I had that goal to get back on a horse, that just didn’t happen. That didn’t happen until I got on board with the NDIS last year.

“It was the NDIS that made that happen. They found someone who was willing and able to help me. My support coordinator, Dylan, he got onto all the right channels and set up the support I needed and made it all happen for me.”

Although Alex has two prosthetic limbs, he doesn’t spend much time thinking about his own needs. He’s a well known member of his local community who dedicates his time to helping others.

Alex sits on the Board of the Derby Aboriginal Health Service (DAHS) and is also Chairperson of the Winun Ngari Corporation, which helps Indigenous communities in the West Kimberley to find employment and access housing, education and health supports, while also working to preserve country and culture.

Winun Ngari provides remote community connector services for the NDIS, alongside the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service (KAMS), which helps people with disability across the Kimberley to access the Scheme.

When Alex joined the NDIS early last year, he says his own life changed for the better.

“It’s been a big improvement, a lot has happened for me,” he said. “I love the NDIS, it’s been great for me.”

Alex’s plan includes funding for support workers who help with cleaning and gardening at home, as well as helping Alex to access his community.

But most importantly, he says, it accomplished his longterm goal. Within months of joining the Scheme, Alex was riding a horse for the first time in over a decade.

He says the experience took him back to his younger days.

“When I met my wife, I came up here (Derby) and went out to live on the stations, and that’s when I went riding horses out there, mustering, and they were the best times of my years,” he said.

“I just loved it, getting out in the bush and sleeping under the stars, getting away from the noise, all you listen to is the birds chirping in the early hours of the morning and the dingoes.

“And I miss those years because I lost my legs and couldn’t work anymore because of my diabetes and loss of limbs. And that was a big blow to me because it stopped me from doing what I loved - riding horses, taking the scrubbers through the ranges and hills and plains, the black soil plains.

“So, yeah, it felt real good to be back out there. I felt a bit emotional but it was really good, a really nice feeling to be back out there again.”

Alex, who is a passionate West Coast Eagles supporter (the club’s logo is emblazoned on his prosthetic limbs), is now working towards a new goal.

“There’s another goal I’m hoping to get is a driving test and that will make me more independent,” he said. “My support worker is helping me with that and I’m gonna start learning.”

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