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WA NDIS participant and former paramedic, Claire Kennelly, has always been the first to help others, particularly in times of tragedy or pain, including as a first responder to the terrorist attacks in New York, on September 11, 2001.

Soon after, working abroad, Claire was diagnosed with aggressive multiple sclerosis (MS), which meant she had to make a “gut-wrenching” decision to forgo her chosen career.

But now thanks to NDIS funding, and support from APM, living with MS has become easier for the 61-year-old.

Now she has resumed her passion, helping others, starting Heart to Heart – a prayer and counselling group for women in any situation and any walk of life.

“I am able to reach out to all women and that is the bigger picture, sharing their hearts. I was devastated to give up my paramedic career, but I decided to concentrate on what I could do as opposed to what I couldn’t do,” she said.

“My APM support worker, Ashlee, has been wonderful. She’s helped me to get all the supports I needed to manage my MS, and she helped me to make my goal of helping others become a reality.

“Ashlee and I discussed my skill sets – to love people; to help them; counsel them; heal hearts; make them laugh over coffee or just to spend a few hours with them to break up the day-to-day monotony in some ladies’ lives. That’s when I decided to facilitate a ministry to women in the community.

A strong Christian for most of her life, Claire said she spoke to church leaders and friends, who eagerly backed the idea.

“During this ever-changing life, there are so many lonely, hurt and confused people. I just wanted to tell them they do matter, they are valued and loved,” she said.

“Sometimes you are the only person they might see or talk to all day, so it’s a beautiful way to give back to my community.”

“I found myself in a very bad medical state and my symptoms were getting worse. I had no one to turn to, and I was constantly hurting my body. Physically and mentally, it looked very bleak for me in terms of function and outcomes.

“I was continually falling, and I was left with no feeling in my legs, feet, arms and hands, but once I started to get support, I began working on developing and maintaining my muscle

strength and mobility, and I was able to increase my capacity and independence.”

Claire said her NDIS plan includes physio and occupational therapies, assistive technology and support workers to help her with cleaning the house and accessing her community.

“Starting Heart to Heart has really fulfilled my passion to help others,” she said.

“The Grove Church and my colleagues have been incredibly supportive, along with the NDIS, APM and my other allied health workers. It’s a win, win for everyone,” she said.

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