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Double amputee Dwayne Fernandes, 36, was born without his fibulas and some toes and fingers, which affects his balance.

Before he was three years old, he had five surgeries and at age 11, Dwayne decided to replace his legs with prosthetic limbs.

Dwayne (middle) with his business partners Jeff (left) and Dan (right).

Dwayne receives disability supports from the NDIS which help him to live his life in Western Sydney.

“I’m a high-energy amputee so I need good technology behind my prosthetic legs to get the most out of them. The prosthetic legs the NDIS funds mimics anyone else’s legs – I can walk up a hill, or I can run around with my five-year-old daughter,” Dwayne said.

Dwayne also uses his NDIS plan to access support to build on his mobility and strength.

“I’m all about mobility. I know eventually I will use a wheelchair in the future, so I want to maximise every opportunity I have.”

Dwayne describes himself as a double amputee, world record holding tower climber, husband and father of two.

But Dwayne is also one third of the brains behind Minds at Play, a Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) online program to teach young people with disability how to communicate and socialise.

Dwayne’s love for D&D began almost six years ago when he needed an outlet for some stress in his life.

“My godchild has autism and I wondered if D&D would help give him the tools to engage in social situations while playing a game. I did some research and found there’s lots of benefits of playing D&D for people with autism.”

Running the first D&D session online in June last year, Dwayne and his business partners, Dan Papallo and Jeff Ozog had no idea starting their side business in the middle of a pandemic would have a silver lining.

“We started with four players and have now grown to 28 regular players,” Dwayne said.

“Part of our success is because of COVID, we played online and our players never leave their safe space which means they’re open to trying more things.”

Ruth Jansen’s son Jacob has autism and is one of the many kids benefitting from Minds at Play.

“It's been really beneficial having Jacob involved with such engaging personalities, Dwayne has done a fantastic job of creating teams of kids with their various strengths and abilities,” Ruth said.

“Jacob has been learning how to listen to the input of others and how to work with his team to achieve outcomes.

“Social skills and boundaries are one of the greatest hurdles for Jacob and this is a safe environment for him to develop these skills which will help him in the long run.”

Progress like Jacob’s is why Dwayne is excited to watch Minds at Play grow. Their sessions are growing more popular, and they have just opened up introductory sessions for their next term.

“At Minds at Play, anyone can come play, learn and make some new friends,” Dwayne said.

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