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From making his mark in martial arts to leading a full and busy life, Michael is kicking goals through NDIS support.

Corneal Keratoconus, an eye disorder leading to blindness, hasn't stopped the 50-year-old from Toowoomba from achieving his goals as a Muay Thai kickboxing instructor and beyond.

With the right supports in place, Michael, who was among the earliest people in Australia to receive NDIS funding for Seeing Eye dog, Cody, is living his best life.

"I used a cane before Cody. He was the first Seeing Eye dog I met, and we just clicked," Michael said.

"I've been very proactive in the process ever since I got Cody, and having the right team around me has always been the key.

"I became an (Muay Thai) instructor, and I now teach two classes a day from ages four up to 65.

"I've reached every benchmark I've set through NDIS support and I'm still going."

That Michael is instructing, let alone even involved in martial arts, is a testament to his drive after his Corneal Keratoconus appeared as a teenager.

From two corneal transplants and five eye operations, the impact on Michael's life and mental health resulted in a life-changing decision that eventually led him to the NDIS.

"Going through all those operations and treatments since I was a teen, I was sick of 30 years on that rollercoaster," Michael said.

"I'd had a driver's licence, operated machinery, run a landscaping business ... I'd done so much in my life, but with the added impact on my mental health, I weighed 165 kilos and was taking 64 tablets a day.

"Enough was enough, so in 2016 I decided to make the big call to stop all my medications and let my eye condition happen naturally."

Setting fitness goals after coming off his medications, Michael re-engaged with Muay Thai.

While his vision has continued to deteriorate, Michael found happiness; driving his weight to below 80 kilos on the way to becoming an instructor with Team Ngapuhi in Toowoomba.

“I put the right support networks around me with the NDIS and set goals, achieved them, and then set new ones,” Michael said.

Through Local Area Coordination (LAC) support through Carer’s Queensland, Michael uses his funding to ensure he has what he needs in place.

Living independently, Michael accesses assistive technology (AT) supports such as a talking jug, talking microwave, and a voice-activated Smart System.

Michael also uses his NDIS funding for cleaning support, podiatry, a dietician, and psychology, and accesses a support worker who assists with transport, as well as shopping and recreation – which includes indulging in a love of the outdoors.

“I love going camping, kayaking and trail walking, and despite my eyes, I’ve always tried to not delete too much out of my life,” he said.

With Cody now nine and nearing retirement, Michael is preparing for finding his sidekick a foster home while finding a new perfect fit.

Acknowledging how hard it will be to part with Cody, Michael’s harnessing of mind power has been a key in overcoming obstacles on the way to achieving great things.
Michael’s long-term plan is to continue building towards full independence, while paying his positivity forward and advocating for others.

“I wouldn’t be where I am without the NDIS … it’s as simple as that,” Michael said.

“I wouldn’t be able to do what I do, but my long-term goal is to continue to utilise my NDIS supports to set things up to a point that one day I don’t need it.

“I’ve been very proactive in the process, and I want to advocate for people and enrich others, and show them the steps to move forward.”

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