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Wayne Raffo has an unbreakable connection with the ocean and his beloved Freshwater Beach on Sydney's Northern Beaches.

"I was in the water from when I was a little kid and started surfing at about 13 years old. My grown-up kids all surf now too," Wayne says.

Wayne remembers the day when everything in his life changed. He was 46 years old.

Wayne Raffo enjoying the beach

"I was surfing and I couldn't get up on my surfboard. I didn't know what was wrong," Wayne says.

Tests showed Wayne had multiple sclerosis (MS). It severely impacted his mobility.

"I couldn't use my left leg or left hand," Wayne says.

For Wayne, a fit and active surfer and ironman who lived life in and out of the ocean, it was a devastating blow.

He could no longer get into the water to do the things he'd always loved, or even get down to the beach to watch his 4 sons surf.

Now, after 16 years, Wayne is reclaiming his life on the northern beaches, with support from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

He recently returned to the sands at Freshwater Beach, thanks to an NDIS-funded all-terrain wheelchair, and the support of NDIS provider MS Plus.

"I cannot believe what a fantastic piece of assistive technology this chair is, and how it has helped me achieve my goal of getting back on the beach," Wayne, 62, says.

"That was the first time I'd been on that beach since I walked on it after my last surf. I had not touched sand with my feet or hands for 16 years.

"It was surreal. I wasn't in the water, but I was only 2 feet from the high tide mark after so many years. It was the best feeling."

The all-terrain wheelchair has given Wayne back some independence and opened up his world again.

"We can get it into the car so there are lots of trails on the peninsula I can access now. I couldn't do that without the all-terrain chair," Wayne says.

Wayne has also been using an NDIS-funded powered wheelchair for the last 6 years.

“That was a godsend. My wife doesn’t need to push me in the old wheelchair if we go for a walk. I was able to take the Parramatta River Cat for the first time, and I can go to the Brookvale Oval to watch the footy,” Wayne says.

"I wouldn’t be able to do any of that without the powered chair.”

With support, Wayne has also adapted to life at home.

After his MS diagnosis, Wayne found moving around outside his house both difficult and dangerous.

NDIS-funded assistive technologies made it safer and easier.

“Before the grab rails and the automated gate were installed, I had many falls and broken bones,” Wayne says. “Now I feel more confident moving around, both inside and outside my home.”

Wayne’s home is also equipped to help him improve his strength, stability, and fitness.

He trains in his garage using a rehabilitation exercise machine and is guided by neurological physiotherapists – all funded through his NDIS plan.

With hard work and perseverance, Wayne is feeling stronger and healthier and loving reconnecting with his local beach and neighbourhood.

Wayne says it wouldn’t be possible without the support of the NDIS and his community.

“I’d be stuffed without the NDIS,” Wayne says.

“I am also grateful for the help of MS Plus, Specialised Wheelchairs, and the Advance Rehab Centre at Artamon.

“I’ve been lucky. I also have my mates and my family for support.

“One day my mates will throw me back in the water. I can’t wait to taste the seawater again.”

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