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A communication device made for non-speaking people with autism is helping young Harvey Hart find his voice.

Harvey, 6, from Calliope in central Queensland, uses an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device as part of his NDIS plan.

This tool has helped Harvey, who speaks few words, to communicate and participate in daily activities.

His mother, Shannon Hart, who self-manages his NDIS plan, says the ‘Liberator’ AAC device allows Harvey to reach his full potential.

‘When Harvey was about 18 months old, we picked up a few signs that he might be autistic,’ Shannon said.

‘He was having problems with speech, as well as with his gross and fine motor skills.

‘It was a case of trying to be on the front foot with early intervention.

‘Having that AAC device through his NDIS plan has helped Harvey enormously with his literacy.’

After he became an NDIS participant in 2019, Harvey was enrolled in an early intervention program through Autism Queensland. He now accesses weekly speech and occupational therapy supports.

His funding also includes ankle-foot orthotics, which are customised braces that bring Harvey’s muscles and joints into alignment to help improve his walking pattern and support weaker muscles.

‘It has got to the point where Harvey is now starting to run, thanks to his braces,’ Shannon said.

‘Before his braces, Harvey would always be sporting a bruise on his head because he would be falling over almost everywhere he went.’

With support from husband, Johnny Hart, Shannon, an accountant, was able to return to work while caring for Harvey and brother, Ethan, 4.

‘Now that Harvey’s in school, I’m able to go back to work part-time, which has been great,’ Shannon said. ‘I feel happy knowing he is able to communicate with everyone at school.’

The ability to self-manage Harvey's NDIS plan means Shannon has more choice over what providers are used and extra control of how the funding is invested.

'Harvey wouldn't be where he is today without the support of the NDIS,' Shannon said.

'The NDIS has changed Harvey's life. It's been great for all of us.

'My hopes are for Harvey to continue to grow in confidence, and to know that his disability won't hold him back.'

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