Posted on:
5 April 2024

In his wildest dreams, Dom never imagined being Australia's first trans man with disability to run a successful dance academy dedicated to sparking joy in the lives of people living with disability.

But then again, the Toowoomba local had no idea that at 25 he'd suddenly acquire the life-long disabilities of functional neurological disorder (FNS), multifocal dystonia, hemiplegic migraines, and Raynaud's syndrome.

At one stage Dom had a medical episode so severe it left him paralysed and unable to walk or talk for months, with neurologists and doctors uncertain he'd ever fully recover.

'While I was sitting in my wheelchair paralysed, I had a lot of time to think,' said Dom, a 33-year-old dance teacher, who taught every style of dance before his health deteriorated.

'I realised that as a person with disability, I now had the unique opportunity to teach dance from a new perspective; with lived experience of disability, compassion and understanding.'

With a determination to get back into his dance studio, Dom worked day and night to regain his abilities, every day persisting despite dealing with seizures, blackouts, and intense pain.

Life-changing supports helped Dom with his recovery in 2020 when he received assistance to apply for NDIS funding through Carers Queensland, one of Australia's largest NDIS partners in the community.

The scheme funded support workers to help Dom with daily tasks, as well as occupational therapy, psychologist, physiotherapy, and speech therapy appointments.

The NDIS also helped fund assistive technologies such as a wheelchair and power-assisted wheelchair system, to help Dom regain his independence.

'I'm grateful to the NDIS, it helped me through a really hard time. It's also a relief to know that when my health deteriorates again, which can be at any time, support is available,' Dom said.

While he's been told by neurologists that he can relapse at any time, Dom isn't letting 'what ifs' stand in the way of him throwing his heart and soul into helping people with disability discover the joy of movement.

'I had to teach myself to dance in a wheelchair and that was another lightbulb moment for me, realising I could still dance, just not how I used to,' he said.

Dom has been teaching seniors and junior classes in a church hall for the past 2 years, with his students also learning dances to perform at local events such as Harmony Day.

A highlight of Dom's week is teaching at Endeavour Foundation and Choice, Passion and Life Toowoomba (formerly the Cerebral Palsy League).

Smiles abound as Dom bursts through the door with a huge smile on his face and a funky outfit befitting his outgoing personality.

Last year when Dom explained to his dance community they'd be seeing some changes to his appearance, he was humbled by his dancers' reactions.

'After about 6 months into my transition I sat my class down and I explained that for the past 8 years I had known that I was a trans man and that I didn't want to hide anymore,' Dom said.

'I told them they'd be seeing some big changes and that if they didn't understand they could ask me or their carers. I reassured them I would still be the same person.

'After that I didn't get the same number of cuddles – I got more. It's just so special and beautiful the way they accept me for who I am.'

Dom said when he decided to teach dance to people with disability, he never realised how life altering it would be him or the wider community.

'One of my goals in setting up Disability Dance studio was to change everyone's way of thinking when it came to disability,' he said.

'I want to show the world just how capable people with disabilities are because I'm so tired of the way society views us.

'I've been that person having a seizure in public who gets a funny look or laughed at. We see and feel everything.

'It's time for change and I can't wait to be a part of it.'

As for what's next on his dance card, Dom wants to set up another studio in the rural town of Dalby, an hour west of Toowoomba.

Dom now also has a dream, to franchise his business so more dancers with disability can teach people with disability and experience the pure elation he does daily.

'It sounds like the weirdest thing to say, but I think it's a blessing that I got unwell because if I didn't, I would never have thought of opening this business,' Dom said.

Related Stories and videos

Joining the Scheme gives Matt a new sense of control and independence.

Matt’s on top of the world and ‘free’ again, thanks to NDIS

4 June 2021
Taree NDIS participant, Nathan Moore, has just released his first country music single on Spotify and iTunes.

With NDIS support Nathan is releasing his first single

6 December 2021
NDIS participant, Dave Barrot, is merrier than usual this Christmas, landing a job at North Geelong’s inclusive Café Bear & Scoobs.

Dave’s new job is the best Christmas present ever

25 December 2021
More stories and videos