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James Brown is passionate about building a better NDIS, so he takes every opportunity to improve it including attending any NDIS co-design workshops or working groups.

‘I’m doing my bit to help the Scheme evolve faster and become better,’ he said.

At 46, the 52-year-old from Belmont acquired a rare neurological condition.

‘I woke up one day paralysed from the waist down. Within 24 hours I was paralysed from head to toe,’ James said.

‘I was totally alert; I could see and hear, but it was like my body was locked in and I couldn’t interact with the world.’

Prior, James was working for the New South Wales Health Department. He had also worked in aged care, local government and he was CEO of a community housing provider.

‘That’s why I’m super keen to be part of initiatives like co-design. It’s a great opportunity to connect with change-makers and speed up Scheme improvements,’ he said.

‘Also, involving people with lived experience of disability adds a level of quality and practicality to change efforts which is something money just can’t buy!’

For the past year James, who lives in Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA), has been involved in an NDIS Home and Living Options working group, which just finished up.

‘For me personally, it was an excellent experience and I feel for Agency staff it provided insight and valuable learnings too,’ he said.

‘Co-design is new, and the Agency is really embracing the concept.

‘You won’t get a Rolls Royce performance from your first effort, but it’s important to give it a go, capture learnings, deliver tangible improvement and do it again,’ he said.

A complex area, NDIS Home and Living Options involves several business processes.

‘It’s a large part of the Scheme and it’s costly. Life-changing decisions are being made, involving lots of Agency staff with complex considerations,’ James said.

‘The Scheme has also grown. It’s become too complex, and it has made it difficult for participants and staff.’

James said as a group they knew making progress in the Home and Living space would be challenging, but all the sessions were productive.

‘We worked through several complexities, identifying critical areas that needed further effort and change,’ he said.

‘We also defined steps the Agency could take to deliver real benefits and improvements.’

Months were spent brainstorming, workshopping and teasing out critical Home and Living Option information and processes to pinpoint priority areas for change.

‘Valuable discussions were had, and it took co-design forward,’ he said.

‘It was a good learning experience for Agency staff, and they got clear direction on the next steps the Agency needs to take.’

Now with a set of priority project areas to focus on, James said more co-design workshops are planned.

‘It would be fantastic to be part of this next phase,’ he said. ‘If not, our group has done some excellent work. It’s helped to lay the foundations for improvements to follow.

‘I applaud the Agency for its commitment to improve the Scheme and to do it in partnership with participants through co-design.

‘One key learning was it did take longer to get through our work than it should have – cycle times need to be shorter to speed up improvements.

‘Another key learning was only through healthy debate and discussion – challenging the status quo, and exploring and exchanging ideas, the real power of co-design is realised,’ he said.

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