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Peter, a 56-year-old proud Wik-Mungkan man from Aurukun in Far North Queensland, remembers the day he had a stroke and wondered what was to become of him.

‘I got up to go to work and I couldn’t move my right side. I was paralysed,’ he said.

At the time Peter didn’t know he was having a stroke. He knew something wasn’t right so he called out to a coworker who came running.

Before he knew it, he was laying in Cairns Hospital, nearly 1,000 kilometres from home.

With his mobility affected, unsure about his recovery and how he was going to get home, a nurse talked to him about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – how it could help and he was supported to apply.

Successful in his application, Peter used his NDIS funding to connect to a local support provider who could work with him in hospital and at home.

He also connected to another support provider who offered physio and occupational therapies to help him get moving again.

With all this support, Peter got the help he needed to leave hospital. He was happy he could go home to start his recovery with family and friends in his community with culturally fit support.

At home, to support Peter’s mobility needs, he had a wheelchair, a walking stick and hand rails were put up in his bathroom and toilet to make it easier for him to use.

More importantly, being home meant his family and his community were there to support his recovery journey. It’s when Ben, Ivan and Robert, all First Nations support workers from his community, banded together to help.

Alice, one of Peter’s support workers, said the impact the NDIS has had on him goes far beyond his physical recovery.

‘Having access to the NDIS meant Peter could return to his community, his country and able to be surrounded by family and friends really helped his recovery,’ she said. ‘Without the NDIS it wouldn’t be possible for most First Nations community members,’ she added.

In remote towns like Aurukun, allied health professionals typically visit only once a month. To ensure Peter's progress didn't stall, his team developed a daily exercise plan he, with the help of his support workers, could follow.

Doctors once told Peter he might never walk again. But with determination and the unwavering support of partner, Maisie, he defied the odds.

'Maisie was there from the start when I had my stroke,' Peter said. 'She tried to push me in the wheelchair all the time and I said, no, I want to try and walk with my cane.'

Today, Peter is not only walking but thriving. He's back fishing, mowing lawns, and sharing his cultural knowledge with the younger generation as an Elder in his community.

Before his stroke, Peter worked identifying cultural heritage sites in areas marked for mining – important work he's eager to return to.

'Before they do the mining, we walk the bush about 500km, looking for scar trees and shell middens and we mark them,' he said.

'Scar trees are where the old people would cut the tree to make weapons, like spears and shields, from the wood.

'Sugar bee honey was also harvested from the trees. They took it out with a stick to eat and kept the wax to polish the spears. We don't want to lose those trees.'

For Peter, NDIS supports mean he is able to live and work on Country and pass on knowledge to the next generation is everything to him.

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