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National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participant Jessika is living a life she loves.

From Sydney's Northern Beaches, Jess, as mum Jayne affectionally calls her, is living in Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA).

SDA is housing designed for people with very high support needs, like Jess, with features that make it easier to live safely, comfortably and with greater independence.

From the outside the home looks like any other around the neighbourhood. It's close to shops and public transport – exactly what Jayne and Jess had hoped for.

Inside, the home has been purpose-built so Jess and her housemates can move around comfortably and safely.
Wide doorways and hallways provide plenty of space for wheelchairs, while accessible bathrooms and ceiling hoists help make transfers smooth and safe.

Thoughtfully designed living spaces allow support workers to assist when needed while Jess continues to take part in everyday activities around the home.

Jess, who has cerebral palsy, lives with 2 other NDIS participants. They all have their own bedroom and support workers help them continue their own routines safely.

Jayne said with these NDIS supports in place Jess is thriving.

'Jess just loves where she's living, and why wouldn't she?' Jayne said smiling. 'She has wonderful support around her. I just love seeing her so happy.'

Jayne moved from England to Australia, had Jess here, and raised her on her own.

'Jess was born prematurely at just 26 weeks,' Jayne said. 'She was a twin, but sadly her sister didn't survive. Doctors once thought Jess might not live past early childhood. Now she's 27, enjoying life on her own terms.'

Jess is supported to use an NDIS funded Sip-and-Puff communication device.

With a gentle sip or puff into a mouthpiece, she can select words and phrases on a grid, which generates speech.
'It helps Jess advocate for herself,' Jayne said. 'She can tell people what she needs, how she

feels and when she's had enough. It's incredible technology.

'I didn't think it would work for Jess at first. I wasn't sure she had the mouth strength, but she took to it straight away. Jess actually prefers it to eye-gaze. It's given her a real voice.

'I'll ask Jess, "Do you want me to go home now?" and she'll say, "Yes, please". That's independence,' Jayne laughed.
Jess moved into SDA in 2019. For Jayne, letting go after being her main carer for so long was a big step. The transition brought new opportunities for both.

'Now Jess can choose how she spends her time,' Jayne said. 'She's living her own life and that's exactly how it should be.

'For me, I'm not working anymore, so now Jess is safely cared for I can actually go and do things without having to worry about her. If I'm not with Jess, we can still video chat.'

Jess's supports include regular physio and hydro therapies which help to maintain her movement and overall wellbeing.

Hydrotherapy is a crucial support for Jess, a wheelchair user, because it means her body can move freely without the risk of injury.

Jess is a huge animal lover, regularly visiting farms to spend time with animals. She also enjoys sailing with experienced volunteer sailors who take her around Manly Harbour. Feeling the wind in her hair and sometimes a splash of seawater is a thrill.

'For Jess and me, the NDIS has been life changing,' Jayne said. 'We can both live our lives knowing we are connected, supported and safe.

'Jess is just Jess – disability or not, she knows what she wants. Now she has the supports around her to live the life she chooses.'

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