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Shania can hardly contain her excitement as she wheels around her new share house – a suburban four-bedroom home the 18-year-old will live in with two other females and a support worker who will provide them with around the clock care.

From the outside, the Roxburgh Park home looks like any other in its estate. It's across the road from a park and close to all amenities. No one would ever know it was Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA), designed and built with the latest assistive technology to house complex high needs National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants.

Inside, doorways are wider; wheelchairs have under-bench access to the kitchen sink; the doorbell has a camera so each participant can see who is there, and with a touch of a button on their device, they can open the front door if they choose to let a person in.

The properties are the brainchild of Empowered Liveability Director, Nicole Doherty and her co-directors, Goro Gupta and Joseph Salfaro, who all have lived experience with disability.

The trio have collaborated with families, governments, communities and investors to come up with an insightful way of helping people with disability move from other care arrangements, such as nursing homes, into family-friendly, suburban-living environments.

"When participants move in to their houses they have a sense of ownership," Nicole said.

"It's their home. They can decorate it the way they like, and with their NDIS Supported Independent Living (SIL) funding they can choose any provider they like to support them so they can come and go as they please and lead the life they want.

Shania's mum, Danielle, said she is so excited about her daughter's new living environment at Empowered Liveability's latest property in Roxburgh Park.

"It's a safer, more accessible and age-appropriate living environment for Shania," she said.

"We just knew when we went through the house it felt right. It had such a good feel and we were just so happy."

"It's been so tough for us in the past but now this is a huge positive in our lives. Shania can get out there and do so many more things – things that haven't been possible for her to do before," Danielle said.

"Being able to live in this kind of environment will just open up so many doors for Shania. It's a beautiful feeling to know she's living in such a welcoming and inclusive environment."

As for finding out about SDA, Danielle said she had a great support from Jacinta, at DHHS, who showed her the housing website to see what type of accommodation was available to Shania, who is non-verbal, with a rare autosomal recessive genetic disorder.

“Shania’s condition affects her cerebellum, the part of the brain that controls balance and coordination and other areas, thus limiting her mobility,” Danielle said.

“Then one day, I was on Facebook and Empowered Liveability’s page popped up. As I read about the business, I liked the sound of what they were doing.

“I noticed they had an open house inspection, in Tarneit, not far from my house so I thought I would email them about it because it sounded ideal for Shania and it was close.”

Danielle said it didn’t take long before she got a reply.

“Empowered Liveability said they didn’t have any properties ready to look at but when they did they would let me know, and they did,” she said.

“When I arrived at the house with Shania’s sister, Rhiannan, and did a walk through, the feel when I walked through the front door, the atmosphere the home had, and the reception we got from Nicole, Goro and Joseph, it was just so positive. It really put me at ease and, honestly, I felt at peace.

“I knew there and then it was the right living environment for Shania so I explored it more.”

Danielle said making it all happen was a process but with the help of Jacinta, DHHS Disability Practice Advisor – Children, Youth and Families VIC and Catherine, NDIA Specialist Planner, service provider GenU, and Empowered Liveability, who all helped to guide her through, Shaina’s new home has become a reality.

“I can’t thank everyone enough. I’m so grateful. No amount of words can express how much. God Bless them all, they are all very caring and extraordinary people,” she said.

“I’ve lived with the constant worry about what the future will hold for Shania when I’m not around but now I can see she’s going to lead a much better life – one like any other young person her age. She’s a very smart and bright young girl and I know she will just blossom.”

Our guidelines - how do you get SDA?

Some people living with disability have an extreme functional impairment or very high support needs. Sometimes, they need to live in specially designed houses. We call this Specialist Disability Accommodation – or SDA for short.

The SDA Operational Guideline explains what we need to consider about SDA and how we make decisions based on the legislation.

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