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Meet Caelin, a seven year old boy full of charisma who loves to get involved and give everything a go.

On Sunday 1 December Caelin and his great grandmother Janice Glover went to the Christmas parade in the central west NSW town of Orange, and for the first time Caelin felt confident enough to sit on Santa's lap.

Caelin has had more challenges than most children his age. He was born with spina bifida and uses a combination of a wheelie walker and a wheelchair to get around.

Along with his physical needs Caelin also has cognitive delays which makes everyday tasks more difficult for him, but with support from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) he is now making good progress.

"Caelin has already had two lots of surgery so that he can hold his legs straight but he'll never be able to walk properly," Janice says. "Luckily he's got a cheerful personality and loves going to school and getting out and about. He does everything a child without a disability would do.

"He's been using a manual wheelchair since he was three and he can ride a modified pushbike. He loves footy and especially cricket, and every Wednesday he attends horse riding for the disabled.

"He's about to start supported swimming lessons as well and we've got funding for that."

Caelin lives with and is cared for by Janice, who is 65, and life has been getting a bit easier since they both joined the NDIS.

Caelin has been supported by Mission Australia since July 2018 as part of the NDIS Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) program, while Janice is a below-knee amputee who is now on her second NDIS plan supported by Local Area Coordination provider Social Futures.

One of Janice's daughters and a grandson live with her, while Caelin's mother lives close by and visits almost every day. Caelin also has a younger brother and sister who he sees all the time, along with other members of his extended family who live with his mother.

"We're a big multigenerational family and part of the local Aboriginal community," Janice says. "Caelin himself is descended from the Kuku Yalanji nation from Mossman in far North Queensland through his great-grandfather, my late husband."

NDIS funding pays for Caelin's regular occupational therapy and physiotherapy, plus braces for his legs and other orthotic supports. The family was also able to purchase Caelin a new

wheelchair recently through his NDIS plan which made the outing to see Santa much more manageable.

Janice says the NDIS offers Caelin and his carers much more choice and control than previously, which meant she was able to identify the wheelchair best-suited to his needs and then select the provider to source it from.

Janice also selected best-practice early intervention from a local provider offering a 'key worker' approach to support Caelin with his developmental delay. Recently Janice had a follow-up implementation meeting with Mission Australia to assist her with self-managing parts of Caelin's plan.

"This is great, being able to manage this myself will work for us and give us more choice," says Janice. "Mission Australia has been absolutely brilliant, I couldn't have asked for better support for Caelin.

"He's also had great support from his school - he struggles to concentrate as part of his developmental delay but he's well above his peers in reading and he spells quite well."

Janice says the main goal of Caelin's plan is to keep himself mobile and healthy and help him to become more independent, although Janice admits to being a bit worried about this.

"He has no fear - if he gets out of the yard on his pushbike he just goes," she chuckles. "He's already told me he wants to be a bull rider when he grows up!"

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