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Cairns local, Maria O'Hara, knew the NDIS was rolling out, in Cairns, in July 2018, so at age 64 she did her research and became one of the first participants in the region to join the Scheme.

The now 66-year-old, who is blind, with Stickler syndrome – a group of hereditary conditions causing facial and eye abnormalities, hearing loss and joint pain, said the NDIS has been life-changing and it's opened up her world to becoming more independent.

Relying on husband of 41 years, Tony, who she jokes is her "two-legged guide dog", Maria said they have a wonderful relationship and he has always fully supported her.

"Tony has always been there for me," she said. "He takes me wherever I want to go no matter what but earlier this year he had a fall, and he couldn't walk for a few months.

"I really missed him because he wasn't with me," she said. "It really brought it home, what would I do without him?"

While Maria remains fiercely independent, with Tony and son, Jeremey's informal support, she said she felt relieved she now had NDIS funding to fall back on.

"To join the NDIS, I worked with Cairns NDIS partner in the community, Mission Australia, who helped me to better understand the supports that would benefit me most," she said.

"Now, I've got a lovely support worker who takes me to the shops. It's great because I can spend as much time as I like browsing around without Tony and Jeremey trying to hurry me up," she said with a laugh.

Through Maria's NDIS funding, she was able to buy a Digital Barcode Scanner – a small bit of assistive technology to help her to identify items, and she said the device has given her the confidence to become much more independent.

"Now when I go into my pantry I don't have to worry about whether I'm opening a tin of cat food or a tin of baked beans because the scanner tells me. It's great," she said.

Hand held, or on a lanyard to wear around your neck, Maria said the Digital Barcode Scanner is lightweight, fits nicely into her the palm of her hand and it's easy to use.

"If I'm using the scanner inside, I just leave it on the bench because it's right next to pantry," she said. "Then if I'm after anything, I can just pick it up, grab an item, turn it around until I hear the scanner beep and within two seconds it will read out to me what the item is. It's just terrific.

“The scanner also comes with stickers and plastic tags so I can put them on any items I want to identify. All I have to do is say what it is and with a click of a button, the scanner will record my voice and when I click again, it will read back to me what it is.”

Maria said while the Digital Barcode Scanner is a small piece of assistive technology, having it has been “life-changing”.

“I never thought I would be able to identify things with a scanner,” she said. “Mostly, I have always relied on Tony or Jeremey to help me but now I don’t have to, I can do it myself.”

Maria also has a passion for growing Zygocactus – brightly coloured succulent cactus’s she proudly displays around her home.

“The scanner has made it a lot easier for me to identify my Zygocactus,” she said.

“There’s a lot of different colours so Tony and I have tagged them all so when I want to move them around, I know which colour is what.

“The scanner has also given me a bit more confidence to go out into the yard and go around to our greenhouse to all my Zygocactus. I know with the scanner, if I go looking for something, I can find it.

“Before, if I was looking for anything in particular, I had to drag Tony out. Not that he cares, he is always happy to help but it is great I can be independent and do it on my own.

“It just goes to show with the right assistive technology, you can do things you never imaged you could do before,” Maria said.

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