Posted on:
25 March 2020

It’s been a long hard road for Cameron McMullen but finally he’s back behind a steering wheel, working and living family life to the fullest.

The 35 year old from Ulladulla on the NSW south coast broke his neck in a swimming accident nine years ago and has been a quadriplegic ever since. At the time he was the father of two very young sons and had to cope with the subsequent heartache of not being able to participate fully in their lives.

“The boys missed out on doing so much stuff with me,” he says. “Everything landed on my wife’s shoulders and there was nothing I could do about it.”

After joining the NDIS in 2017 he decided to explore the possibility of getting funding for a vehicle modification.

“One thing just rolled into another and I decided to buy a late-model van, then approached a registered vehicle modification company in Melbourne who put me onto a great occupational therapist (OT).

“The OT drove up to my place in a modified demo van and we had a drive around my local area for an hour or so. At the end of the trial the OT agreed that driving was a doable goal for me.”

Having not driven for eight years, Cameron had to go through the entire licensing process again starting with his L’s right through to completing his on-road driving test with an instructor.

“I travelled down to Melbourne with a carer and spent a week driving the van around to make sure I was used to it before I did the driving test,” he says.

“I had to rely on friends and family to drive me around for eight years and now I’ve got my freedom back. It’s been absolutely life changing.”

Cameron uses hand controls to operate the van and drives while seated in his motorised wheelchair, which locks into place once driven into the van through a side ramp.

“Now I can go shopping on my own, take the kids to out-of-town soccer matches, drop them off at friends’ parties, all the stuff that’s really important as they get bigger,” he says.

“Fynn is now 12 and Sonny is 10 and they’re very social, so I’m always ferrying them around with their mates. They all love the van!”

Cameron is no longer married but remains close to his ex-wife. He says having the van has taken a lot of pressure off her as well, which has been great for family life.

One of Cameron's friends works for a courier company, and just before Christmas he asked if Cameron would be able to do a courier run from the coastal town of Nowra up to Ulladulla for a few hours a day, five days a week.

"I jumped at the chance," he says. "Before the accident I used to be really busy running my own business but since then I've been unable to work, so it was just great to have a job again. I've always enjoyed long-haul driving, the role suits me down to the ground."

Most recently Cameron was able to volunteer his time and van to help out in the south coast bushfire emergency, delivering food to affected communities with one of his friends – "it just felt so good to give back".

Beyond his van, Cameron's NDIS plan funds one-on-one personal care in the mornings and evenings seven days a week, as well as cleaning, lawn mowing and yard maintenance.

It has also paid for podiatry, his Magic Mobility V6 all-terrain motorised wheelchair and repairs to his existing bed and ceiling hoist. He's about to receive a portable hoist and is set to start trials on a 4WD wheelchair "which will allow me to access the beach on my own for the first time".

"I've always had a level of personal care support but what I get now is so far and beyond what I had before the NDIS, it's unreal," he says.

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