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After months of lockdown, 11-year-old Will Chandler-Hoskin couldn't wait to get hooked up to Scuba gear again, swimming and playing under water.

It's one of the things he enjoys the most and it helps him cope with some aspects of autism he finds challenging.

But during COVID, the Adelaide Aquatic Centre was closed, and so was the therapy he loves so much.

"Will tires very quickly when in social situations and also physically, so being able to go under the water where it's quiet and he is not overloaded with sensory input, well, it calms him," said Will's mum Kari Chandler, of Seaford Rise, who helped Will join the NDIS about five years ago.

"He likes having deep pressure, which is what he gets underwater. It helps him to feel calm and regulated physically and emotionally. These feelings continue when he's out of the water."

For about a year before COVID, Will had been using his NDIS plan to attend underwater Immersion Therapy sessions with registered NDIS service provider Determined2 (D2) at the Adelaide Aquatic Centre.

He'd become good friends with D2 staff who Kari says have a special rapport with Will.

"Will finds it difficult to be around kids his own age because he doesn't always understand social rules or cues. This leads to Will being confused and anxious and he gets upset and others get upset with him," she said.

"The guys at D2 are fantastic, he feels really close to them. Socially, Will loves going there to talk to the guys, to muck around with them, just to chat. The therapy helps him a lot physically, makes him a lot stronger, and helps keep him calm, but that social connection is huge. It's been very important for him."

Kari says when Will found out D2 was closing because of the pandemic, he was distraught.

"He was devastated," she said "He really looks forward to going every time, so it was very hard. He cried, he had a complete melt down, everything was just too much for him."

But then D2 offered to support Will in a new way, and he was thrilled. D2 staff connected regularly with Will on Zoom in half-hour social call catch ups, which were cost-free.

Kari says Will doesn't usually like talking on the phone. But the Zoom catch ups with D2 were a huge success from the beginning.

“Will was so engaged, he loved talking with them and telling them about what he’d been doing. He looked forward to the calls and in some ways became even closer to them,” she said.

Will was also able to continue with NDIS-funded occupational and physical therapies during the lockdown. Some of his sessions were in person and others online.

“It was a huge relief he was able to keep getting this support,” said Kari.

“Will has grown so much, he is able to understand his emotions, he can recognise when he’s getting angry or feeling something. He has the tools now in his belt to say all right, I’m feeling this, I need to go and do this. But I think he would be struggling now if he hadn’t continued to have that support.

“It would be a lot more stressful for us as a family and I wouldn’t be able to continue to study or even think of being able to work.”

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