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At 21, Keely Richards has been living with uncontrolled epilepsy nearly all her life.

She has a rare and serious type of epilepsy called Lennox Gastaut syndrome, which means Keely has many different kinds of regular seizures and often in clusters.

But last year, Keely experienced her most frightening seizure yet.

“I had a seizure in a swimming pool and I almost died,” said Keely, 21, of Tweed Heads, who also lives with an intellectual disability and is supported by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

“They told me later they found me at the bottom of the pool. It was terrifying.”

Keely needs to have someone with her at all times, especially when she’s in a pool or at the beach. And until recently, she was afraid to venture back into the water.

But thanks to the NDIS and disability service provider Team Lemonade, Keely’s confidence has grown dramatically in recent months.
With support workers nearby, Keely is enjoying swimming again.

She’s also taking part in several other group activities with Team Lemonade, including gardening, hiking and bowling—all of which she accesses through her NDIS plan.

“I’m not very good with my confidence, I didn’t have a lot of friends after I left school,” said Keely, who works as an office clerk with a family business three days a week and spends the other two week days doing programs with Team Lemonade, which operates in South East Queensland and Northern Rivers, New South Wales.

“The NDIS has helped my confidence a lot. Team Lemonade is a lot of fun and I’ve made quite a few different friends since I’ve been with the NDIS, I’ve learnt so much.”

Keely is also learning life skills including, cooking, cleaning and how to manage money. She recently travelled with Team Lemonade staff to South West Rocks in New South Wales.

“I feel grateful that the NDIS is helping me so I can get out and meet more people and do different things. I’m learning to be more independent,” she said.

Team Lemonade founder and director Elaine Johnston says activities are aimed at helping people of all abilities to increase their independence and their involvement in the broader community.

Her adult son Nathan lives with Down syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

“When I pass away as a mother, I want my son to be able to look after himself, and I don’t want him to be a burden on my other son,” she said. “And Nathan doesn’t want that either.”

Nathan also uses his NDIS plan to attend Team Lemonade programs, which include exercise physiology, gym workouts, meditation sessions, numeracy and literacy classes, shopping and meal budgeting lessons, social days at local sporting clubs, and community gardening projects. But it’s learning to manage money that Nathan says he enjoys the most.

“I’ve been struggling with that all my life and now I can buy my own roll or sandwich at Subway and do my money by myself,” he said. “It means I feel more independent and makes me feel powerful and great to be able to say what I want.”

Nathan, 30, who is a talented singer and dancer, also entertains senior citizens as part of Team Lemonade’s community outreach programs.
Elaine says Nathan’s NDIS support has dramatically improved his life.

“I go into every review and say thank you,” she said. “The NDIS means my son is getting the services he needs to be an independent strong member of the community. I can’t thank the NDIS enough.”

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