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Like many mums, Krystal Matthews loves taking her toddler swimming. Her daughter Zara adores the water. But for Krystal, the pool holds an even greater attraction.

“I have never picked up my child and walked with her, and I never will,” said Krystal, 35, of Dernancourt. “But when I’m in the pool, I’m supported by the water. I can hold her and we can walk together and I’m at her level. I feel like I’m one of those cool mums.”

Krystal, who has worked as a Senior Social Worker with Housing SA for ten years, lives with cerebral palsy.

In the pool, with a support worker nearby, funded through the NDIS, Krystal can move freely with two-year-old Zara in a way that isn’t possible out of the water.

“It feels so good to have that freedom and to have that experience with her,” she said. “ Zara will be like, ‘Jump Mummy, jump!’, and I'll jump and she'll be like, ‘Yay!’, but then we'll come back home, and she'll be like, ‘Jump Mummy, jump!’ and I'm like ‘No, no more.’”

On land, Krystal has limited mobility and she needs a wheelchair to move around safely. Inside her home, she uses a walking frame, although walking is tiring and there’s a risk of falling.

“Zara is very smart, she knows that I’m not like other mums, but being a good mother has got nothing to do with people's inability,” said Krystal. “It's about how much you love and care for your child and how committed you are to giving them a childhood where they can thrive, and I can do that.”

Krystal is supported by the NDIS to live an independent life where she can balance the demands of work, being a mother, and having a disability.

She has NDIS funding for physical and occupational therapies, which help keep her healthy, and support workers who help her to live the life she chooses.

“Without that support, I would feel more disabled, and I would feel guilty as a mother, because every mother wants to give their child experiences. I don't want my disability to impact negatively on Zara,” she said.

Krystal uses NDIS support workers to help her to care for Zara, prepare meals, clean the house and maintain the garden. But she says, she’s in charge.

“The NDIS is helping me to be the mother I want to be. I’m getting the support I need to get Zara in and out of the bath safely, but I can still have that experience and give her a bath myself.”

Krystal says Zara’s favourite toy is her “Wheelchair Barbie’—a reflection of her love for her mum and what she’s learning about diversity.

“When I was born, there were a lot of preconceived notions of what I would achieve or who I would be, so, I would never talk, I would never walk, I would never have a proper job, I would never live independently, and I'm doing all of that,” she said.

“I may not be able to do everything other mums can do, but I can teach Zara more about the world, and more about determination and the beauty of difference.

“Being a mother is the most beautiful role I've ever had, and it also feels like the most mainstream role. I’ve always been a person with a disability, I've always been a child with disability, and even though I've always tried not to make that my key identity, it has kind of always been that way.

“But now I'm also a mother with a child. And that's a completely mainstream identity that I'm very, very proud of.”

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