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After a dirt bike accident left him a complete quadriplegic 14 years ago, Matt Carey never dreamed he’d be back doing what he loves most - riding bumpy mountain trails or trekking long distances through the wilderness.

But that’s exactly what he’s been doing lately - and he says, it’s all thanks to the NDIS.

“I thought that part of my life was over really, those things were just out of sight, you just didn't even really consider it,” said Matt, 41, of Tom Price, Western Australia.

“I thought it was just bed to wheelchair, that everything was going to be via wheelchair with someone helping me. And for many years, that’s what it was, I couldn’t imagine anything different.”

But since joining the NDIS, Matt says he has a new lease on life.

“The NDIS has given me back my control and independence,” he said. “It’s made a huge impact on my life and my family. It has been a massive turnaround.”

Matt grew up loving the outdoors and riding and touring around the countryside. His desire to do that didn’t change after his accident. But, he says, access did.

“Nine times out of 10, it's up and down hills or gravel paths and you’re just not able to have access to those paths yourself so there's always someone helping you - until now,” he said.

Using an NDIS-funded Batec - a power-assisted handbike, which clips on to his wheelchair - Matt recently traversed about 30 kilometres of rocky terrain through the John Forest National Park.

He and a close friend, who is also a quadriplegic, spent the day travelling together through the forest to Mt Helena.

“Wow, I honestly can’t express my feelings, it was just freedom plus!” said Matt. “We just took off, both of us, two wheelchair users and no one else with us, travelling at our own speeds.

“It’s the first time in nearly 14 years I’ve felt that I’ve got hold of the world, I was free to feel the breeze through such a nice forest. We travelled through the tunnel, then along the dirt, sand, and muddy tracks over hills, bumps, humps, branches, you name it!

“It was that sense of independence and not needing anyone else around to worry about us or help us. Freedom, that’s what it feels like being able to do something on your own again, just freedom.”

Matt’s NDIS plan has also given him increased independence closer to home. He now has a Jee Trike, an off-road handcycle, which means he can ride off-road around town.

“It’s just been awesome to tour around on your own accord again,” said Matt. “I was doing a lot of mountain biking before I had my accident, and my family and friends ride around town with bikes, so it's really changed things a lot for me.

“I’m meeting people and going out and doing things that you like together, being social and doing the things that you enjoy. It’s fantastic.”

Matt’s NDIS plan also provides funding for support workers who help him get ready for work at Rio Tinto where he has worked since before his accident.

“It really takes the pressure off my family having that support, and it means a lot less stress for everyone,” he said.

“Life is a lot better now, just knowing you’re supported in your goals. You're not sitting there dreaming about what you could do. It’s made a huge difference in all areas of my life.”

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