One family’s move to the Pilbara has helped a young boy with autism

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From Perth, to Margaret River and now to the Pilbara, Sandra Conejeros, husband Craig Sutherland and their son Caedan Sutherland are grateful for the NDIS.

Nine-year-old Caedan has autism, and Sandra says he has loved their move to the Pilbara.

“Caedan has really done well with the move. He loves the warmer weather and we have a pool, so he is in there most afternoons!” Sandra said.

“On weekends we go camping which Caedan loves. He also loves the ocean and he’s been on the boat a few times.”

“Before joining the NDIS, he was non-verbal. We visited a speech therapist who had a feeling Caedan could have autism.”

The family accessed Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) for early intervention supports, and Caedan then transitioned onto the NDIS.

“The supports the NDIS has funded means Caedan can express himself now,” Sandra said.

“He used to have a lot of outbursts when he was upset, but he’s learned how to manage that.

“He’s even telling me what he learns! Mornings before school can be a bit hectic, especially if we’re running late, so if I’m rushing around he says to me ‘Mum, take a deep breath and slow down’.”

Caedan’s progress is why Sandra is thankful for the NDIS, and partly why she chose to self-manage Caedan’s plan.

“I love the choice and control self-managing gives me.”

“Using his NDIS plan, Caedan sees a speech therapist, a psychologist and attends a sensory support group where he participates in social activities with other kids so he gets exposure to different things.

“Living in a remote area, it can be hard finding the right provider but self-managing makes it easier.

“It is also a lot to understand when you first start, but I make sure participants I come in contact with understand the benefits of self-managing.”

In her personal life, Sandra is a mum to a NDIS participant but in her professional life, she is the Disability Service Manager for Mawarnkarra Health Services. Part of her role is to help inform

and educate the local community about the NDIS.

“I love my job. I saw the ad for this job and I thought, well I have the skills and knowledge of the NDIS. Why not apply?” Sandra said.

“I really advocate for participants and their families and carers to exercise their choice and control. People with disability are some of our most vulnerable, so I do my best to make sure they know what’s going on.”

“For some, that includes exploring self-management as an option and training them on NDIS process and systems. I know how much it’s helped our family and I want the same for others.”

The next goal for Caedan is to focus on his wellbeing.

“His short term goal is to discover and place a value on his self-worth. His long term goal is to find a happy place, and share it with his family and friends,” Craig said.

“He will look for help from us and his NDIS supports to achieve these goals.”

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