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Only four years ago, it was a challenge for Brett Hall to get out of bed, let alone leave his home.

The then 16-year-old had trouble making friends, lacked the confidence to go out, and was often anxious, lonely and isolated.

Brett was living with a new diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and significant anxiety due to gender dysphoria – the distress caused by a mismatch between his biological sex and his gender identity.

“I was often lonely, I didn’t have friends, it was very hard for me at school, I was dealing with a lot with gender dysphoria,” said Brett, 20, a trans man of Kingswood, South Australia.

But today, thanks to his own determination, his caring family and a range of supports funded through the NDIS, Brett has a new circle of friends, is out and about in his community, and is feeling more positive about his identity, his life and his future.

“The NDIS has been really good for me, it’s put me in touch with people who have helped expand my social skills and confidence in myself,” he said.

Brett wants to share his story to help raise awareness of the challenges faced by people like himself.

“I think it’s important to raise awareness but also it gives people who are affected by it a chance to speak up and be able to go ‘OK, this is me, I’m like this person’,” he said.

Brett has a message for other young trans and gender diverse people.

“I would probably say, you’ve got all the time in the world, you can learn to love yourself, just be yourself,” he said.

Brett is now a proud member of the LGBTIQA+ community, enjoys socialising and sometimes going out for coffee, and is busy learning new life skills.

He attends Autism SA’s Next Step program, funded through the NDIS School Leaver Employment Support program, which helps him to build skills through a range of workshops and activities.

Brett has gained enough confidence to travel independently to attend the program. He hopes to start a university foundational studies course next year.

“I’m feeling like I’m doing pretty well now,” said Brett, who also lives with significant health problems and pain caused by Crohn’s disease and low muscle tone.

“I’ve made friends with people through the Next Step program and I feel like I’m able to connect with them. I’m a lot more confident and a lot less lonely than I used to be, though I do still have my down days. Gender dysphoria doesn’t disappear so I think we can expect those days every so often, but I’m looking forward to starting Uni.”

Brett and his father Jason Hall believe a key part to Brett’s newfound confidence is support from people with lived experience of gender diversity.

NDIS support workers from within the LGBTIQA+ community have helped Brett on his trans journey.

“When Brett first began to transition, he thought he had to do it very quickly, to make the change in months, and I think that was also contributing to some ASD symptoms,’ Jason said.

“But with help from support workers, Brett has learnt there’s no rush and the transition process can take years or even decades. The key is to accept yourself in any one of those stages and love yourself for who you are.”

Brett’s support worker Rachel Lafain, has seen a huge transformation in Brett’s confidence.

“Since he’s been able to present in a way that’s affirming for him as a young man, that has certainly helped his confidence, you can see he’s a lot prouder of who he is, now that he can look and live the way he’s always wanted to,” she said.

Brett says Rachel helped him feel included by introducing him to the LGBTIQA+ community.

“I feel a really big sense of belonging whenever I’m around that community because even though we may not have interests in common, we still have that big overarching thing that connects us,” he said.

Brett’s other NDIS support worker is a transman with new Adelaide disability service provider ColourFull Abilities, which supports members of the LGBTIQA+ community living with disability.

“Being able to have people there for me who have had some of those experiences themselves has been really good for me,” Brett said.

The NDIA is committed to ensuring that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and asexual (LGBTIQA+) people with disability have an equal and equitable chance to benefit from the NDIS.

The NDIA LGBTIQA+ Strategy outlines our commitment to being respectful and responsive to the diverse needs of people with disability who identify as LGBTIQA+, their families, carers and

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