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Living with COVID-19 restrictions is different for everyone. For Debbie Sturdy, she wasn't sure the impact these restrictions would have on her son Matthew Carpenter.

Debbie is one of the primary carers for Matthew, and she is also one of the 2.65 million carers in Australia providing unpaid support.

Matthew, 33, has non-verbal Down syndrome and receives support from the NDIS. The NDIS funds supports like occupational therapy, speech therapy, day programs and personal assistance.

Debbie says her son has been 'soaring' since becoming an NDIS participant.

"Matthew loves life just like anyone else. He loves seeing and doing new things, he just communicates and understands things differently," Debbie said.

Describing her son as a social butterfly, Debbie was concerned how Matthew would cope with his supports moving online.

"At first, Matthew struggled and COVID did have an impact on him because he's so sociable. His occupational therapy, speech therapy and day programs are currently delivered on Zoom.

"Over time I could see his supports moving online helped Matthew in a way. He's thriving with more one-on-one opportunities and has learned how to deal with change.

"His football sessions with Heroes with Abilities are online now too. They've helped Matthew keep active and he's chatted to professional NRL players who have come online to have a chat.

Matthew goes for the Penrith Panthers, and he got to meet Ivan and Nathan Cleary so that was quite special.

"Using the NDIS, Matthew is learning how to be more independent, how to take care of himself and he's grown so much confidence.

"Before the NDIS, Matthew had very little support so my family and I took on more tasks as his carers. Now, his NDIS supports are tailored to him and he's learning how to be the best version of himself.

"Matthew used to find it quite challenging to hold and grip things. Also with this limited speech, I wanted him to overcome his communication barriers.

"Our chosen provider, LiveBig, has helped Matthew in so many ways. His occupational therapist has helped Matthew make great progress in building hand strength and his ability to grip.

“Since working with his speech therapist, Matthew can communicate so much better now too. We’ve had lots of milestones and one in particular is Matthew learning more sign language.”

Debbie says little things lift a bit of weight off her shoulders each day. It’s these things that many take for granted, but they’re huge steps for Matthew.

“Although his achievements may seem little for other people, they’re big for us. All of these achievements work together to improve his quality of life and we’re living the benefits.”

The NDIS has opened up opportunities for Matthew and Debbie can see the sky is the limit.

“If we didn’t have the NDIS, he wouldn’t be where he is now. Watching Matthew’s progress has filled my heart with so much love, and I feel proud every day,” Debbie said.

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