Esther shares her story to encourage others who don’t have a voice

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NDIS participant Esther Simbi had survived a war in South Sudan, life-threatening polio, and nearly two decades in refugee camps in Uganda, but it wasn’t until she was living in Adelaide as a mum with a disability, that she reached her lowest ebb.

A series of significant life events led to what Esther describes as the ‘darkest moments of my life’.

Without employment or adequate support, Esther became isolated and struggled emotionally.

“I used to stay in the house almost all the time,” she said. “Sometimes I would try to go to community events but it was very hard going by myself. I have been at events when everyone was lining up for food and I didn’t have help and couldn’t line up, so I left without eating anything.

“I felt very out of place, like I didn’t belong in my community. 2017 was the darkest year of my life.”

Just as Esther was despairing for her future, she joined the NDIS – and her life turned around.

“That was fantastic, it was a lifesaver for me,” she said. “The NDIS came at just the right time for me and it changed my life. I’m happy now and I have all the support I need.”

Esther, 39, was born in South Sudan, which at the time did not have polio vaccines. Paralysed at four, she regained some mobility but lives with post-polio syndrome. She uses a walker or wheelchair and lives with muscle atrophy, scoliosis, and debilitating fatigue and pain.

Today, with help from NDIS support workers, Esther regularly takes her children to the park or shopping for clothes, and attends school, sports and community events.

“With the NDIS, I have a voice, I have a choice and I can live my life my way,” she said. “I didn’t have that before. And now I’m part of my community. I belong.”

Esther is taking part in a video to raise awareness and celebrate this year’s International Day of People with Disability (IDPwD) on 3 December.

Produced by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), the video will be broadcast on NDIS Social Media platforms on IDPwD.

“There are a lot of people in the community who haven’t had a voice, so I share my story to encourage other people,” Esther said.

“When I was growing up, I got bullied a lot and people used to tell me that nothing good will ever come out of me. But I have two beautiful daughters, I went to school, I went to University, I graduated with two degrees – I have a lot to be happy for, a lot to be positive about.

“I have been through a lot and I’m still here. I want to encourage and inspire people, and maybe I can help someone when they’re going through that hard time in their lives.”

Esther is a dedicated human rights and disability advocate and helps others with disability from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities to understand and access the NDIS.

She works as a Project Officer with Social Profit Organisation, JFA Purple Orange, and hosts NDIS capacity-building workshops for Spanish-speaking communities and the Nepalese-speaking Bhutanese Community.

“Many people in CALD communities don’t know anything about the NDIS, they don’t understand what it is,” Esther said.

“I want to help to educate those people about what support is available. I love supporting people to live a life they choose, to achieve their goals and reach their full potential. I love to empower people to understand that disability is not inability.”

Esther’s own NDIS plan provides assistive technologies, including modifications for her car. She also has daily support workers who help her with every day activities at home, taking the children to school, and accessing her community.

“I don’t know what I would have done without the NDIS,” she said. “Having the NDIS makes me feel really good, it makes me feel privileged, being in this country and receiving this kind of support,” she said.

Esther’s list of achievements includes being the first refugee of African descent to run for Parliament in the Upper House. She is also the author of two memoirs, Beyond Calamity and Blessed.

Esther’s story showcases the impact we can all have when we see people for who they are and the things they can do.

To help celebrate the day you can download the IDPwD pack including a social media pack, poster, virtual meeting background and email signature block on the IDPwD page.

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