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NDIS participant and stroke survivor, Hande Akbulut is hitting her goals for six.

Hande's recovery following a stroke in 2016 has been a long journey from Melbourne to the cricket pitches in Geelong, but the now 24-year-old has regained her confidence and increased mobility with disability related supports provided through the NDIS.

Finding social interaction and unity at South Barwon Cricket Club, Hande is padded up and facing challenges head on.
"I was never a cricket person and had only been to one game in my life," said Hande, who grew up in a football loving Turkish family.

"But my physio was coaching the men's (South Barwon) team and they said they were putting together a ladies team, which would be a way to get involved in the community and great for my mental health.

"I was nervous in wondering whether I'd be embraced or feel unwanted, but they didn't even notice my disability and made me welcome."

Hande's journey has seen her take part in a NDIA produced video to raise awareness and celebrate International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD) on December 3.

While Hande's giant strides have her ready to attack the upcoming season, they also cut a strong contrast to a time where she wasn't sure whether she'd ever walk or talk again.

"I was having brain surgery for my epilepsy and an incident resulted in a stroke," Hande said.

"When I woke up, I couldn't talk or move my right side. It took about three months to start saying single words like "dad".

"I was in hospital for about three to four months and every day I was having physio, speech therapy, occupational therapy, hydro therapy, and seeing a psychologist and psychiatrist.

"I started to get small movement back through my leg, but I thought, 'if I want to get as much movement as I can back, I have to do something about it'."

That quest materialised for Hande through becoming an NDIS participant and accessing the supports needed to help her reach her goals.

From a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background, Hande didn't know much about the NDIS, but says it changed her and her family's life.

“My mum passed away in 2010 and most of my family is in Turkey. After my stroke, my dad (Hakan) had to stop work and look after me 24/7,” Hande said.

“It was a struggle financially and mentally, and then someone suggested the NDIS may be available.”

Now living in Geelong, Hande’s assisted at home through supports for cleaning, cooking, and personal care.

Beyond the home, Hande engages in physiotherapy and occupational therapy, as well as exercise physiology sessions through the Geelong Neuro Centre.

Hande’s sessions focus on activities to strengthen her body, retrain her neurological messaging, and regain a form of function she enjoyed prior to her stroke.

Hande hopes to run again, as well as write and bowl with her right arm after adapting to her left. A trip to Turkey is on the list, as is gaining her driver’s license, and finding a career she loves.

With the cricket season approaching, building upon a third-placed finish last year has her zeroing in on success.
“I’m so excited… cricket has become really important, even for my mental health,” Hande said.

“I used to get fatigued taking two steps, but my strength and balance has improved so much and I can now walk 7-9kms.

“With my speech supports, I can’t even explain how much I’ve improved… Now dad jokes that when I start talking, I can’t stop! - It’s all just given me so much motivation.”

It’s that motivation built through NDIS support which Hande wants to share with the world.

“Life is worth fighting for, and always keep your eyes open for those supporting you,” Hande said. Just because you acquire a disability, it never means your life is over, and if you put your mind to it, you can achieve whatever you want.

“I’m just so thankful for the NDIS. I’m as happy now as I’ve ever been in my life, and I wouldn’t be where I am without the NDIS.”

Hande'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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