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From river walks to dinner dates, NDIS participants Emma and Heath’s journey has culminated in a Valentine’s Day to remember.

After meeting at a day program funded through their NDIS supports, Emma, 39, and Heath, 43, who both live with intellectual disabilities, are celebrating their love on the biggest day on the relationship calendar with a special boat cruise and dinner.

After two years, Emma still remembers the day Heath asked her to be his girlfriend.

“It was on a bus coming back from the day program. I was happy and in tears and when I told my family, they were all excited for me,” Emma said.

“He is a great man, and I can feel the love in my heart…to be seen by your partner for who you are and be accepted and celebrated; it’s a good thing.”

Their Valentine’s Day celebration marks a special moment in the couple’s journey, through a determination to make their relationship work.

Facing barriers in finding ways to see each other regularly after meeting, Emma and Heath made the decision to move to one of NDIS provider, Momentum Collective’s Supported Independent Living (SIL) houses in Mudgeeraba and Ashmore respectively.

Through NDIS-funded support workers who facilitate their time together, the pair have choice and control over their lives. With their love not defined by disability, Heath said he would like to see everyone who is looking for love be supported in finding their soulmate.

“My support worker listens to me and helps me see Emma,” he said.

“They know what I like to do and help me plan activities with my girlfriend.”

Inseparable and speaking every day, the couple enjoys barbecues, visits to the Gold Coast Botanical Gardens, regular outings and visiting each other at home.

Support worker, Jessica, who plays an active role in Heath and Emma’s lives, said they showed having a physical or intellectual disability doesn’t change the need for a loving relationship.

Excited by playing her part in making a Valentine’s Day to remember, Jessica said it was the right for everyone to be able to live their best lives and express their love.

“When people with a disability form intimate relationships, they often experience cultural stereotypes and prejudices that can be hurtful and damaging,” she said.

“I’m here to support Emma and Heath; giving them back the choice and control on what they do and who they live with.”

Enjoying some of their favourite snacks and celebrating Valentine’s Day with smiles from ear-to-ear, Emma and Heath are looking forward to many more ahead.

Planning to live together and get married one day, Emma and Heath’s SIL manager Kelly said the pair can look forward to planning a big future together, which was made possible through the NDIS.

“NDIS has made this model of SIL possible; before the NDIS there wasn’t any flexibility,” she said.

“They didn’t have choice and control and now they can. All because of the NDIS.”

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