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NDIS participant Maria Pyatt’s trips traversing her family’s Mildura property on her all-terrain scooter play out on a path paved in figurative gold.

Where once Maria, 49, was primarily indoors due to Multiple Sclerosis (MS), dreams of daily rides into her family’s grapevines to see her beloved father Pasquale for ‘smoko’ are now a reality.

With the pathway between her home and her parents sealed through NDIS funding, Maria, now equipped with her scooter affectionately named “Stephanie”, has the supports to go beyond and reach her goals. “I live on a 30-acre block, and my parents live about 100 metres away.

Between our houses, the driveway is undulated, so the NDIS funded a concrete path for me to be able to walk down and see them every day,” Maria said.
“But, I wasn’t able to go and see dad out on the block for about seven years, as I couldn’t walk down there.

So, a goal was to go out into the vines and take him a bottle of water when it’s hot, or a coffee.

“A normal scooter wouldn’t make it around the property, so my occupational therapist suggested Stephanie, as it’s all-terrain and four-wheel-drive, and it has a canopy.

“After getting it, I was so excited and I went down to see dad in the vines and it was amazing … he was so rapt.

“It’s given me a level of calmness in knowing that if I need to see dad, I can go see him and get a hug and life feels as it should.”

Born and bred in Mildura to a tight-knit Italian family, Maria combined the country life with professional pursuits in sewing and hairdressing.

Maria said symptoms of MS came and went, until her life changed forever when the disease was diagnosed in her 30s.

“I had a seizure when I was five, which could have been early signs of MS,” Maria said.

“Then when I was 26-27, I was walking to work and my legs went out from under me, and when I was 29, I woke up (temporarily) blind.

“My symptoms went away for four years, then one day when I was hairdressing in 2008, I all of a sudden couldn’t use my fingers to put in rollers… I had an MRI and that’s when they realised it was MS.”

With lesions discovered on her neck, spine and brain, Maria underwent strong treatments and did what she could to get by in caring for son, Declan, through the support of her parents and husband, Stephen.

Keeping busy by immersing herself in cooking, Maria said her life changed forever after becoming an NDIS participant.

Supported through Access Your Supports, Maria uses her funding for her walker “Genevieve”, specialised shoes, home supports such as a cleaner and garden maintenance, and for nutrition support and meal preparation.

NDIS-funded home modifications have also allowed Maria to live the life she wants, and through an NDIS-funded support worker, Maria enjoys coffee outings and social engagements.

“I wasn’t able to get out of the front door at home for about four years as there was a step. Now I can go out and all the way around the house, and I have four vegetable planters through my NDIS-funding which I can walk out to,” Maria said.

“I also got bathroom modifications; I can walk into the shower with Genevieve and they lifted the vanity basin so I don’t have to lean over.
“There’s also hand rails that that look like cool towel rails.

The way it’s done was important to me as I didn’t want my son to be reminded of my disability all the time.”

While Maria’s days of hairdressing and doing what she loves professionally are behind her, she said she was positive about the future ahead.

“My end-goal is to stay in this home, and I know that when I’m no longer able to walk, the NDIS has set me up to be able to remain here forever,” Maria said.

“I’ve gained so much confidence through the NDIS, and a sense of peace in knowing my future is going to be okay. I also know that if my situation changes with my disability, the NDIS is there and they’ll help me adapt to those changes.

“I can do what I want to do and feel good about myself by going out onto the block and looking after dad too ... without the NDIS, I wouldn’t be able to do that.”

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