Richard supports positive change for First Nations peoples and people with disability

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After a motorcycle accident in 2018 left Richard an amputee, he spent months in hospital wondering if he was ever going to be able to ride a bike again.

But since accessing the NDIS, Richard has been supported to get back on a motorbike, go hot air ballooning, swim with whales, and fly a gyrocopter.

Richard, also a fully trained counsellor, is devoting time to supporting amputees and advocating for First Nations peoples living with disability.

> Richard McCarthy with the NAIDOC award for Valuing and Embracing Disability in First Nations Communities. Richard is with Nikki Robson, Local Area Coordinator Carers Queensland (left) and Jocelyn Wills, General Manager Carers Queensland NDIS LAC PITC Program.

“One of things I have done since becoming an amputee was jumping out of an airplane, I did have a parachute on,” joked Richard, a Murri man and a member of the Gunggari mob.

Gunggari country, in Queensland’s Maranoa region, is nestled between the towns of Charleville, Roma, St George and Bollon.

“There are a lot of things I’m doing that having an NDIS package has enabled me to do because I can get legs,” Richard said. “I am fairly active doing things, I’m a bit of an adventurous person I suppose.

Richard said it took quite a few months to emotionally come to terms with what had happened to him and how different his life would be moving forward.

But he said getting involved in the peer support group Happy Chat helped in his recovery and fight against depression. It was through his involvement with Happy Chat that he discovered Limbs 4 Life, the peak body for amputees in Australia.

After attending the AMP-ED Up! Conference in Canberra, Richard took steps to get involved in helping others and is now an active member of Limbs 4 Life’s National Amputee Advisory Council.

The council’s common goal is to ensure the peak body meets the diverse needs of all amputees, including First Nations peoples, across Australia.

Richard, in his early 50s, also sits on Carers Queensland’s Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Advisory Committee. The committee, made up of First Nations peoples, helps ensure communities are part of the RAP and able to advise on local issues that need local solutions.

“Being a Murri man, as well as a person living with disability, is a way that I can support my community and help to ensure that all people have access to services that are respectful of their social, economic and cultural needs,” he said.

Richard is also involved in Carers Queensland’s Driving Inclusive Change Value and Embrace project.

“The fact First Nations peoples are able to have input into how things are being done in Carers Queensland and other local organisations is pretty good,” Richard said.

If time allows, the adventurer is also considering working in the disability sector, educating First Nations peoples with disability about the supports available to them.

“If there was scope for having people employed locally to look after local people out west, that would be a good thing, I’d like to see that happen,” he said.

“I’m really wanting to advocate for people with disabilities, First Nation peoples, and amputees as well. I don’t want to be sitting around doing nothing, but I don’t want to be doing too much.”

“I’ve had people come up to me and tell me that they know someone who has been inspired by watching me and that I was having an impact on other people in the community. So that was good to hear.”

NDIS supports have also allowed Richard to have his car modified so he can drive out west on a regular basis and get back on country and attend cultural and family events.

“If I didn’t get an NDIS package, and the support from the communities that I’ve lived in and the community at home in Mitchell, I don’t know where I’d be really,” Richard said.

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