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After 7 years North Geelong resident Pete Frith’s dream has come true – his wife Kelly has left aged care to live in her own Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) built unit with 24/7 care, all thanks to her NDIS funding.

“The change in Kell has been remarkable,” Pete said.

“She’s much happier, we can see she’s more alert with her facial expressions, more vocal and when we play music she taps away on my hand.

"To be able to visit Kell when we like is a dream come true.”

Kelly, 49, had a series of mini strokes and then a major one at 42.

At that time it left the wife and mum of one-year-old, Adam, non-verbal and unable to care for herself.

Three months later, undergoing rehab in hospital, Kelly’s condition hadn’t changed.

At the time Pete’s world was crumbling, supporting Kelly in hospital and Adam at home.

Doctors advised Pete it would best for everyone if Kelly was transfer to aged care.

“It was hard. I had so much responsibility,” Pete said.

“Kell couldn’t walk or talk. She had to start learning everything from scratch.

“I was supporting her with rehab then I had to psychologically separate myself from what I was doing to help Kell to concentrate on raising Adam.

“I also didn’t want Kell or Adam to lose their bond.

"It was my main focus.

"I wanted Kell to be aware Adam was her son and Adam to be aware Kell was his mum.”

Not the right environment for a young family, Pete said Adam was always in trouble for running around the aged care facility and making too much noise, disturbing residents.

Then when COVID hit, it became even harder for Pete and Adam to keep their family connection.

Aged care protocols didn’t allow children under 16 to visit.

“Given Kell’s condition it made it extremely difficult for her to communicate with us.

"All we could do was go up to her window and wave – we were on one side; she was on the other.

"We just wanted to give her a hug," Pete said.

Seeing the Frith's struggle to maintain their family connection, Kelly's NDIS support coordinator, Jodie Brockman, from Access Your Supports, enlightened Pete to an alternative and much more beneficial living option for Kelly.

"I explained to Pete how the NDIS could fund Kelly for SDA and Supported Independent Living (SIL) to live an independent life in her own place with 24/7 care," she said.

"At first Pete was a bit hesitant.

"Even the aged care facility manager was too, due to Kelly's high needs, but once explained and shown what SDA and SIL looked like; how it worked, and how Kelly would get more support than she would in aged care, it was fine."

Then Jodie set to work supporting Pete with Kelly's NDIS application.

"It took lots of planning given Kelly was considered a high-risk discharge," Jodie said.

"We worked with the aged care facility for 4 months.

"We had several meetings to get all Kelly's information together.

"It was a thorough process to support her to safely transition.

"We also worked with Kelly's allied health professionals, Vilay Hogan who built Kelly's SDA unit and disability provider Nextt – Mel and her staff who manage all of Kelly's care.

"We are all just so happy with how much the move has improved the Frist's lives."

When Kelly first came through the door of her new SDA Pete said it felt "incredible".

"To have Kell in such a beautiful home with such excellent support staff has turned our lives around," he said.

"Now Adam and I can be with Kell whenever we want. We can be a close family again."

Kelly is one of several NDIS participants able to choose where they live, and whom they live with.

Recent NDIS Annual Participant and Family and Carer Outcomes reports shows 75% of NDIS participants who have been on the Scheme for 5 years or more feel they have more choice and control over their lives.

Kelly and Pete are among thousands of NDIS participants who feel the NDIS continues to positively shape their lives, and 80% feel more confident about their family's future.

In 5 years, the NDIS has also seen a three-fold increase in families and carers who agree the Scheme has helped them to better care for their family member.

Kelly is one of over 151,000 Victorians benefitting from the NDIS.

The NDIS is now providing support to over 534,000 Australians and more than half are receiving supports for the first time.

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