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Mildura cafe owner and business manager Tamina Bettess has an important message for people with disability – it's okay to ask for help.

"I have always been quite a strong, independent person, and I think you grow up with something like this, you feel you've always got to be okay, because it's easier for others around you," Tamina said.

"But being able to learn to be vulnerable, to then become stronger, has actually been empowering."

Tamina, 39, was born with spina bifida, a condition that affects the spine and spinal cord. With reduced feeling and nerve function in her feet and legs, Tamina walks with a limp and has problems with balance.

Until she joined the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Tamina also lived with chronic and debilitating pain.

"There'd be days at a time where I would be stuck on the couch and in bed," she said.
Just when Tamina was planning her own wedding, her situation took a turn for the worse.

Tamina's neurosurgeon delivered devastating news – she needed high-risk spinal surgery.

"He said, if I waited too long, I would lose everything from the surgical point down, so the bladder, the bowel, walking function, everything. And if I had the surgery, if even the slightest thing went wrong, it would be the same outcome," Tamina said.

"So, there was a high possibility, that either way, I wouldn't be walking, and I would be in a wheelchair by my wedding."

Tamina decided the time had come to look for more support.

"For a lot of my adult life, I was quite complacent with my own care," Tamina said.

"So, for me, it was a process of having to accept that yes, I have a disability, and that disability is not a bad word. I'm still a mother, I'm still who I am and having a disability doesn't change that."

Tamina reached out to the NDIS – and the decision changed her life.

"Because of the NDIS, and the supports I now have, I've been able to maintain a regular routine of appointments, so I have a lot of exercise physio, physio and hydrotherapy, and I've been able to build up my strength to keep fit and healthy, so that my body can hold itself up,"

Tamina said.

“When I had my follow-up appointment with the neurosurgeon, he said whatever you’re doing keep it up because we don’t even need to think about surgery for at least another 2 to 5 years.

“And last year, I got to walk down the aisle – I wore shoes and I walked, it was amazing!”
With her increased strength and fitness, Tamina’s pain has all but disappeared.

“Now I’m lucky if I have a pain day once a month. It’s incredible,” she said.

Tamina is now enjoying married life, while juggling co-parenting 3 children and a busy career.

She and husband Peter employ several staff at Geo Origins Cafe and Roastery in Red Cliffs.

Tamina also manages a caravan park and does admin work for another company.

“I feel like in the last 2 years, I’ve fully come into who I am as a person,” Tamina said.

“I thought I was an empowered woman before, but I really am now. These extra things I wouldn’t have thought I would be able to do, I can do them because of the NDIS.

“I have built up my strength so I can work more hours and have greater social contact with family and friends. I’m more available both emotionally and physically.

“The NDIS has allowed me to be a better person for all the people in my life.”

Supported through NDIS partner in the community in Mildura, Intereach, Tamina says she now feels positive about her future.

“With the physical strength has come a more enhanced mental strength,” Tamina said.

“You’ve got to be mentally strong to go through the medical trauma stuff I have, but now, it’s a more confident strength, because I know I’m supported in every way, shape and form in my life.

“And if things change in the future, as I know they almost certainly will, I know I have that support.”

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