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Finding mates can be hard for those on the autism spectrum, but a national website is helping neurodiverse people like Josh Mandis make lasting friendships.

Josh, 24, from Baulkham Hills, is a NDIS participant who lives with autism.

With World Autism Day on Sunday 2 April, Josh wants to tell his story of how he found a group of mates that have turned his life around.

Josh's mum, Elisa, helped find a social group called Mates That Matter (MTM), which posts regular meetups on The A List Hub, a website designed to connect people with autism in their local area.

"Mum was a bit worried about me because I was losing touch with people I had befriended," Josh said.

"I was catching up with a friend about once every 2 months.

"I didn't have that many friends.

"Mates That Matter organises outings and activities so men with autism who live locally can meet and make friendships, which is important for mental health.

"There's nothing more important than having mates."

Mates That Matter founder, Dan Drapac, says the group is committed to developing lasting friendships.

"Mateship is such an important aspect of male mental health that isn't given the attention it deserves," Dan said.

"Josh brings a smile to everyone around him. His passion for life is what makes him a great mate.

"It is obvious Josh has found his tribe."

Josh's NDIS supports have also made a huge impact to his life.

Since joining the Scheme in 2019, Josh has been able to access a psychologist and an exercise physiologist.

"I see the psychologist to help me manage my anxiety and any negative mindset I might have, Josh said.

“The exercise physiologist helps me improve my fitness, which will also improve my mental health.”

Josh’s NDIS plan also allows him to access MTM activities through The A List Hub, which is funded through the Department of Social Services.

The A List Hub general manager, Madeleine Jaine Lobsey, says about one-third of young people with autism in Australia have no friends other than family or paid support staff.

“We are making it easier for people like Josh to find and connect with social organisations like Mates That Matter,” Madeleine said.

“Our national platform lists hundreds of social options so that young autistic people can easily find activities they love in a safe and fun space.

“Whether it’s gaming, surfing, Dungeons and Dragons, camping or simply hanging out, The A List Hub is a place where everybody will find their thing.”

Thanks to the confidence borne out of his newfound friendships, Josh is going from strength to strength.

Last year, he got his driver’s license at the first attempt.

He is employed 2 days a week with a supported employment organisation, working as a packer in a factory.

Currently living at home, Josh has a goal to move into a place of his own and gain employment in the retail sector.

Josh is urging people to “be kinder to people with a disability”.

“Don’t let people define you based on who you are and your disability,” he said.

“Give people who have autism a chance – you’ll be amazed at what we can do.

“My message to other people with autism is to believe in yourself.

"There are lots of great people out there who will support you.”

Josh is one of more than 172,000 in New South Wales benefitting from the NDIS.

He is one of almost 200,000 participants nationally who have listed autism as their primary disability.

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