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As a new mum, Chelsea Thomas is so grateful for all the supports she's received from Cerebral Palsy Alliance (CPA), disability provider EACH and the NDIS.

It's all helped to give son Harvey, now 2, the best start in life.

'I feel lucky we were surrounded by all the right people,' she said.

The Wollondilly Shire mum said within 24 hours of Harvey's birth he was in Liverpool Hospital's newborn intensive care unit (NICU).

'Harvey had haemorrhaged. He needed a blood transfusion, then he started having atonic seizures. As first-time parents it was so scary.'

A brain scan confirmed stroke and some brain damage. Three months later Harvey was diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

'Considering what Harvey's been through, he is doing incredibly well now,' Chelsea said.

'He's reached all his milestones. He's a little bit delayed but he will reach them all.'

Experiencing a whirlwind of emotions, Chelsea said she and her husband had limited knowledge of disability – what it meant for Harvey and what it meant for them as a new family.

'It was a bit overwhelming at first but the physio in the NICU was fantastic. I think she knew Harvey had CP from the start.

'She referred us to CPA. As a new parent I just went – Cerebral Palsy Alliance, what's that and why are we going there?

'The physio said, 'Well we can't be sure what's wrong, but we are going to start early. It can't hurt'.'

Chelsea said they attended CPA's Prairiewood Early Diagnosis Clinic where Harvey had access to physio, occupational therapy and speech pathology initially.

‘CPA told us all about the NDIS – how the funding could help put early childhood supports in place for Harvey. Staff also helped me collate all the reports and evidence I needed so Harvey could become an NDIS participant,’ she said

‘Then we were connected to EACH. We were about to start working with its Childhood Intervention Team to continue developing Harvey’s skills, but before we could meet face-to-face the country went into COVID lockdown.’

Uncertain how to continue with Harvey’s therapies, CPA and EACH offered the new parents telehealth appointments.

‘We had OT, speech and physio therapies happening. All of Harvey’s therapists met with us online via Zoom so they could show us what to do,’ Chelsea said.

‘They were all really good at explaining everything I needed to do with Harvey.

‘The OT showed me how to support him with hand actions and the physio used a doll to demonstrate how I needed to hold him.

‘Even when I had any questions about how to do things like introduce foods, I was always supported,’ Chelsea said.

While COVID did make it ‘a bit of an experience’ for the couple, Harvey is now thriving.

‘All the hard work has paid off,’ Chelsea said. ‘Harvey’s really come along. He’s doing everything you would expect a 2-and-a half-year-old to do.

‘He’s climbing, running, and jumping – all of his fine motor skills have developed. He’s talking and he just loves learning to swim with me in the water.

‘He surprises me every day with the things he does and comes out with. It’s just amazing.

‘If we didn’t have all this support who knows where we would have been,’ Chelsea said.

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