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Hip-hop artist MC Wheels is using the healing power of words and music to carve out a career as a talented rapper while managing his physical disability.

Nine years ago, doctors diagnosed Nathan Tessmann, aka MC Wheels, with Spinal Muscular Atrophy with Respiratory Distress Type 1, a degenerative condition with no cure.

‘Over time, my muscles slowly get weaker and weaker as I get older,’ Nathan said.

Nathan also lives with Lordosis, a condition where the back muscles lose strength and the spine curves inwards.

But that hasn’t stopped Nathan, a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participant since 2018, in pursuing his goals. If anything, it’s what drives him.

‘I want to prove to people I can do things, even though they say I can’t,’ Nathan said.

‘One day, I discovered I could ride a skateboard. That’s when my whole life changed.

‘I wanted to go as fast as I could. It felt like running to me.’

With his muscles weakening, unable to push himself in a manual wheelchair, Nathan used his NDIS funding for an electric wheelchair. He also needs support to get in and out of his chair.

However, Nathan is fiercely independent, and lives alone, apart from daily visits from support workers who help him with domestic duties and transportation.

Before he became an NDIS participant, Nathan’s mother, Roslyn Rasmussen, was also his primary carer.

‘I had to rely on Mum not working that day so she could take me to appointments,’ Nathan said.

‘It’s hard watching your mum losing work to care for you, but she was always happy to help.’

With Nathan’s NDIS funding in place, life has also improved for Roslyn.

‘I had a private cleaning job, which allowed me to shift my work around to care for Nathan,’ Roslyn said.

‘Being his sole carer, it stopped me doing a lot of stuff in my life.’

Roslyn now works full-time in administration and joins friends at her local outrigger club 3 times a week.

‘I’ve gone from being a carer back to a mum who can also live her own life,’ Roslyn said. That’s what the NDIS has brought us.’

After 3 albums and sharing the stage with some of Australia’s finest hip-hop artists, such as Hilltop Hoods and Bliss n Eso, Nathan is ready to take MC Wheels to the next level.

Thanks to an NDIS-modified van, and his support workers along for the ride, Nathan is preparing to perform in Sydney in December at a disability support event.

‘We’re open to travelling interstate now we have a modified van that will go the journey,’ Nathan said.

In his spare time, Nathan plays wheelchair soccer in Brisbane and gives motivational speeches at local schools.

His goals for next year include recording another album and more live shows.

‘For a person with a disability, it can be hard to find your place in the world,’ Nathan said.

‘My advice is to just go for it. No one can hold you back in life except yourself.’

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