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When Ashlee Dolby was out clubbing in her 20s, doormen would ask her how many drinks she had consumed, even though she was sober.

She knew something was wrong.

Ashlee Dolby – photo credit Carer Solutions

At 28 she was diagnosed with Friedreich's Ataxia (FA), a rare disease that affects the nerves, often causing loss of mobility, speech, hearing and sight.

‘Friedreich’s Ataxia is a horrible, horrible condition. I present quite well because my speech isn't as affected as it could be,’ Ashlee says.

‘So I am fortunate, but I am also unfortunate. I work really hard to slow the progression of the FA.’

Now 37, Ashlee uses funding from the NDIS to maintain her physical capacity and independence.

‘My goal is to remain independent, which helps with pretty much everything, accessing the community and doing things at home by myself,’ Ashlee says.

‘I can't walk unaided. I use different mobility aids depending on the environment or how long I'm going to be out.’

As Ashlee’s capacity deteriorated, she decided her access to the world would be limited only by the accessibility of the places she wanted to go to.

But there was no information about which Melbourne venues were wheelchair and disability friendly.

So Ashlee started an Instagram page, '@accesswithash’.

She reviews cafes and restaurants through a mobility scooter user’s experience, considering entry ramps and sufficient space.

‘I couldn't find that information anywhere. So I thought why not take the photos and videos myself, and share them with other people,’ Ashlee says.

Ashlee wants people to be informed, and for businesses to take on her feedback and make the

necessary changes.

‘I don’t review places without an accessible toilet or accessible entry, they’re my 2 deal breakers. I want people with a disability to know they can just use my page to easily choose somewhere that will be good for them,’ Ashlee says.

And Ashlee has plans to reach a wider audience with her reviews.

‘I’m working on a website at the moment because it will be easier for people to find than my current page, and not everybody uses social media.’ Ashlee says.

Ashlee has not let her disability define her. But living with a disability has set her on a path in her personal life and career.

As senior client support service specialist with NDIS provider Able Foods, she helps Scheme participants access healthy meals.

‘I speak to customers and families and make sure they have the right funding in their NDIS plans to access our services,’ Ashlee says.

Ashlee’s NDIS support gives her the physical capacity to do what she is passionate about, helping others who live with a disability.

‘I mainly use my NDIS plan for capacity building. Physical therapy is so important for me to keep strong and remain as independent as possible,’ Ashlee says.

‘I do hydrotherapy, physiotherapy, and I have support workers who assist me in the gym and get me safely to my appointments.’

Maintaining her independence and physical capacity was more difficult for Ashlee before she accessed NDIS funding.

‘I had to pay out of my own pocket to see a neuro-physiotherapist, so I could only afford once a month which was nowhere near the amount that I needed,’ Ashlee says.

‘I also relied a lot on my mum and sister to take me places, which was impacting their life and their ability to work full time.

‘The NDIS has been wonderful me for me. I can't say enough good things about it.’

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