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More than 45 years after he bravely helped blaze a trail of inclusivity and marched into the history books of Australia, Melbourne's Peter Ohlson, an original 78er, will once again march with pride at Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras this year.

Peter, who is legally blind and has limited mobility after having multiple strokes as a teenager, will again take to the streets to wave the flag for LGBTQIA+ inclusion and diversity.

Despite Peter's challenges, with support from the NDIS, he will celebrate his identity alongside his loving partner of 34 years, Adrian, and hundreds of thousands of others at the iconic event.

Peter will use a powered wheelchair in the parade, funded through his NDIS plan, because he wants to be on the street, among the crowds.

'I won't be on the 78er's Mardi Gras bus. I want to be able to move independently, interact with the crowd, and maybe do a high 5 with someone,' Peter says.

'I'm really grateful for the NDIS and my provider, Pride Disability Services, for helping me attend.

'They helped me find accessible accommodation with the right showering facilities, located close to the Mardi Gras parade.

'If I need care over there, they'll help with that, and they're funding a collapsible powered wheelchair for the hilly Sydney streets that I can get on public transport with.'

Peter was just 16 when he marched in the history-making first Sydney Mardi Gras of 1978.

He's looking forward to catching up with fellow veteran 78ers for what will be his fifth time marching in the iconic parade.

'When I speak about Mardi Gras as an openly gay man, I'm standing on the shoulders of giants because some of those 78ers have been out there advocating for the queer community for 46 years,' Peter says.

'We have a real shared history.'

Back in 1978, Peter was already living with disabilities as a teenager.

As a result of multiple strokes when he was 15, Peter lost most of his vision, and his mobility remains limited from weakness on one side of his body.

‘When I went blind, half of the world suddenly disappeared,’ Peter says.

Peter’s acquired brain injury from the strokes also affected his executive function, meaning he has difficulty processing information.
‘I have trouble focusing, remembering instructions, and juggling tasks,’ Peter says.

But his memory of the 1978 march is clear.

‘I was on Oxford Street and I hesitated on the curb, wondering whether I should go ahead or not. It was like there was an invisible barrier,’ Peter says.

‘Then I stepped off the curb and onto the street to join the march.

‘It turned out to be the most transformative and empowering step of my life.’

The group Peter joined were singing in celebration, but also in defiant protest for gay and LGBTQIA+ people’s rights.

‘When I joined in, I realised that I could sing as loudly as I wanted without repercussions, without fear,’ Peter says.

Peter, now 62, is grateful for the inclusive NDIS support he receives, which includes support for daily living assistance, meal preparation and delivery, gardening, housework, and social interaction.

‘Life would be more difficult for me without the NDIS,’ Peter says.

He recalls how difficult it was being gay and living with disabilities as a teenager in the 70s.

‘At the time you think you’re the only gay person in the world,’ Peter says.

‘And people with disabilities were not accepted as having sexual identities.

‘I was scared to come out as homosexual back then because it was strongly discouraged and hushed up by the institutions that were supporting me.’

Peter loves seeing younger queer people thrive in today’s more inclusive and supportive communities.

‘I went to the Midsumma march in Melbourne recently, and the positive energy of the young people was amazing,’ Peter says.

‘It is worlds apart compared to what we faced in 1978.

‘They’re not encumbered by fear of being outed like we were. I really enjoyed seeing that and I’m excited to be part of that at Mardi Gras again this year.’

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