

## Ordinary dreams

*Jo Basha*

On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1991, Nathan was born. The delivering doctor said, “I think your baby has Down syndrome. You can adopt him out, institutionalise him or take him home”.

I immediately flashed back to when, as a child volunteer, I grew up teaching people with disabilities, including those with Down syndrome, how to swim. The group arrived by bus together and had an hour swimming lesson and then went back to the institution they came from. This was one of the few outings they would have in their week, so they were always excited to swim.

On being told, in that moment, I certainly knew what I didn’t want. I didn’t want my son excluded from life. The hopes and dreams my husband and I had for Nathan whilst he was ‘in utero’ didn’t change.

We realised that we would have to work towards achieving those hopes and dreams but they remained the same. We wanted our son to enjoy all that life has to offer. In the hospital we made a pact that we would do everything possible to enable Nathan to reach his potential...whatever that would be. We agreed that we would have no regrets. We didn’t want to look back when we were 60 and say “what if” or “if only”.

They are the same hopes and dreams that we have for our other children and possibly the same as you have for yours.

The main vision was that we wanted Nathan to live an independent life. We wanted him to go to pre-school, be mainstreamed, play sport, be involved in his community. We wanted him to finish school, get a job, move out of home and live his life independently in a full and enjoyable way. I now like to say interdependently.

I say this as, like all children, Nathan couldn’t do this by himself. He needed a voice, an advocate, his parents, to see that the vision for him would come to fruition. The vision of inclusion, where people with disability no longer sit on the fringes of society and are viewed with pity, or, by some, with contempt.

For me, inclusion literally means inviting those who have been historically locked out in. The real test of humanity is how we can truly be inclusive of all. How we can recognise that through diversity we may be challenged to look at something in a new way and, in doing so, we grow. We grow as an individual and as a society. Inclusion is acknowledging our oneness, not in some ideological way, but with real recognition. There is a song that you have most likely heard where there is a line “We are one but we are many”. This describes beautifully

the vision we hold for our children: the vision that our children will enjoy the same equal rights as others and live full lives.

We all need to have a clear vision for the future, accept that the path and therefore the journey is most likely not to be a direct route. That at times the path will meander and, sometimes, you'll need to go backwards to go forwards. Sometimes you'll take a turn you didn't expect. But always, always hold the vision for your child. For our family, our vision for Nathan was one of inclusion.

I am delighted to say that Nathan is now a confident young man with a strong sense of his own identity who is pursuing his dreams.

I don't want you to think that it was all smooth sailing because it wasn't. You will come across people that don't hold the same vision that you do for your child. In most cases, it is fear that they will fail or fear that the support your child may need will be too costly. Again, I say hold your vision firm and have conversations that may alleviate those fears.

At times, you may check yourself and ask, "Are we doing the right thing?"

I'd reflect on this only at those times when others doubted Nathan and his ability. Reflection was just that and I always came back to the vision we held for Nathan. Each time, we confirmed our belief that we were absolutely doing the right thing.

For our family, inclusion is the only way.



W: [www.resourcingfamilies.org.au](http://www.resourcingfamilies.org.au)

P: 9869 7753 or 1800 774 764 (free call outside metro areas)

E: [info@resourcingfamilies.org.au](mailto:info@resourcingfamilies.org.au)