

The joy of taking the ordinary path

Shelley, Deni and Matt

When Shelley was born, we decided that her life should take the most ordinary route possible - that she should have a life that included the same milestones as her twin sister.

When Shelley was old enough to share her views, she made it clear that she was determined to make her life all that it can be.

Shelley went to regular preschool, regular primary school and regular high school. She jumped at every chance and went on every excursion.

Having two daughters the same age provided us with useful bench marks as to what should be happening at different life stage - the right clothes, age appropriate contexts and so on.

Shelley just did everything the rest of the family was doing – using equipment that would make this possible

We purchased an all-terrain buggy that was suitable to go camping and bush walking. The buggy also meant she was also able to take part in school cross country events with people taking turns pushing her for different sections of the event - and so sharing in her achievement.

Our family loves the snow, so Shelley joined DWA, borrowed a 'sit ski' and we all took lessons and skied together.



When she went back to school with photographs from her holidays, people were amazed at what she achieved. It really challenged and changed people's expectations of what she could do and prompted all kinds of questions and conversations.

At the local school's lunch time soccer game, the rules were adapted so that Shelley could take part. When the ball hit her wheel chair, it was stopped and thrown. People asked if I was worried that she would get hurt in all these outdoor activities.

My view was, and still is, that it is part of the rough and tumble of life.

How did we know that this approach to life would be right for Shelley? It was what we felt and what she was telling us. I was also going to workshops to get inspiration and ideas and I was connected to other families. We met regularly.

Things did not always go smoothly and meeting with other families helped me validate that I wasn't just being a nag when I spoke out for Shelley. It also helped me develop an approach to any issues or obstacles that arose.

I learned to be open, helpful and firm.

I always tried to give as much notice as possible for any requests, to build relationships and to do things in increments where this was viable. I found that being seen to be demanding and expecting everything to be achieved at once didn't work as well.

This approach of building relationships, sharing triumphs and working together has had long term benefits. People in the community, including those who provide services, such as the bus service, really understand why it is important for Shelley to be supported and go out of their way to be helpful.

Because Shelley has always been included in the life of our community, people know her and care about her.

Shelley and the rest of the family are continuing to enjoy the ordinary path. We are not sure where it will lead but we know that we will take on the challenges and conquer them.



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