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A simple gesture for her son's school community has seen Bangalow woman Míša Alexander fulfil a long-held dream to write a story book for children with disabilities.

Míša, who is originally from Canada but now lives in Australia with her husband and three sons Noah, Hugo and Quin, has found success with her children's story book, Fergus and Delilah.

The idea for the book snowballed after Míša wanted to inform her school community about seven-year-old son Hugo, who has autism and an intellectual disability, so she began delivering flyers about him to his peers and their parents.

"It was a little picture of him and it was written in a very whimsical manner as if Hugo was speaking about himself.

"It explained some of his challenges, what he was working on and what some of his needs were, so that his peers could have a better understanding of Hugo."

The response from local parents was overwhelming, with Míša's flyer instilling a level of understanding and compassion which helped Hugo and his family build relationships with their local community.

"The parents' response was amazing. I really believe inclusion in mainstream is paramount for any child or person with any disability, because I think it's important for our communities to be more compassionate towards others," Míša said.

Míša continued to use the flyer while Hugo was young, but soon realised primary school would present a different challenge.

"I realised the flyer was really powerful and I continued to do it through Hugo's pre-school years but, when Hugo was about to go to school, I did have this thought that there will be 300 kids and they're not going to get it.

"That's when the idea of the book came in, I knew I had to have a book but I didn't know what the book was going to look like."

[Transcript for 'Hugo skates his way to inclusion'](#)

With more than 20 years' experience as a graphic designer and illustrator, Míša knew she had the creativity but needed to find someone to contribute the written aspect.

A series of unfortunate events – including Hugo flushing her phone with potential business partner contacts down the toilet – led Míša to business partner Erin, a teacher who had experience working with children with special needs.

The pair applied for a grant, which they won, and kick-started their dream. Today, the book is in various schools around Australia, as well as in the homes of young children. Recently, the pair have developed the 'Fergus Figure', a plush toy which children can take home and document their time with him in their Fergus Journal.

The creative ideas for the book and Fergus Figure stemmed from Míša's desire to produce something different to the traditional books on disability.

"I wanted to target mainstream, I didn't want autism on the cover. I just wanted people to pick up this really quirky looking book, get to the end of it and realise that one of the characters had autism.

"My mother-in-law always said that Hugo was wired a bit differently, which was a really great metaphor, so that's where the idea for boxes on their head and wires for hair came from. Fergus had twisted wires and everyone else had straight wires because they were 'typical.'

"In the book, Delilah continues to persist in connecting with Fergus, despite Fergus' traits that didn't allow him to connect with her in a 'normal' way.

"The message behind the book is that it's not just about autism, it's about all disabilities and it's about connecting to people who are different to you. Because it's targeted at a young audience, I hope that it will change a generation's view on disability."

Contributing to that change for Hugo has been greater access to his community, thanks to funding from the NDIS.

Hugo joined the Scheme in February and receives support from speech therapists, occupational therapists and carers who help Míša at home and take Hugo to soccer and the skate park. Míša said these activities have allowed Hugo to better engage with his community.

"Hugo can be included, be seen, be heard and be around people that know him and there's that recognition. That to me is the most paramount thing, that he's out there and people see him and know him.

"It's rolling smoothly and it's great, it was an awesome moment."

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