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Through his NDIS plan, eight-year-old, William Tagg is using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to enhance his speech and parents, Sharon and Rob, couldn’t be happier with the results.

William, who has Down syndrome, experienced delayed speech, which made it hard for him to communicate so AAC, a method of communication to supplement his speech, has supported him to communicate more effectively and participate more in daily activities.

Sharon said through William’s NDIS plan she was able to allocate some funding to a communications tablet.

“It’s purely a speech device, and it goes with him every day to school. William uses it on words he can’t clearly say so people can understand him,” she said.

“It has pictures with words underneath, and on it we can upload photos of people and activities he likes.

“William loves mini golf, and we’ve got a boat so he loves water sports, so we’ve been able to put images on it of places/activities he loves, and images of family members so he can talk about them to encourage his speech.”

Sharon credits William’s improvements to Gateways Support Services speech therapist, Jenna, and William’s school, Spotswood Primary, where Jenna has been able to work at the school with integration aids, Nena and Harry, to support William to use his words.

“I have to say, Spotswood Primary have just been so inclusive of William. It has allowed Jenna to come into the school, work with William, and to see him working with teachers. This approach has improved his focus,” she said.

“Now William is counting to 10; his writing has progressed, and when we write a ‘W’ and do dot, dot, dot after it, he can fill in the rest of his name.

“He’s really come a long way. His pronunciation is much clearer and he is using lots of new words so we couldn’t be more delighted with his progress.”

Sharon said while William did say some clear words initially, and she wanted to encourage him verbally, she wasn’t opposed to him signing or using a tablet to help further develop his communication skills.

She said after William was enrolled at Spotswood Primary, just as orientation started, the principal said the school now has three children with Down syndrome in Prep.

“It’s a real credit to staff, the principal, and the greater school community, who have all collaborated to make it such a wonderfully inclusive learning environment,” she said.

“Even when we’re not at school, we can’t go out without William being flocked by kids, and prior to COVID, he was costing me a fortune with all the birthday parties he was invited to!

“Families, mums, dads… I don’t know half of them because their children are in different grades, but we always get ‘Hi William. How are you William? Hi William’s mum.’

“He’s got such a friendly personality and gels quickly to people, and when he puts that smile on he just melts hearts.

“We couldn’t be happier William is in a mainstream school, and now he is equipped with all the right supports we can see he’s really beginning to blossom,” she said.

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