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Drysdale's Adam McCoughtry can't wait to get back to school this year to start Year 6 and be Drysdale Primary School's 2023 Dan Dan Nook House Captain.

Last year his fellow Drysdale Primary school students voted him in and mum, Julie, said it's all he's been excited about and talked about in the lead up to going back to school.

Sports crazy, the energetic 12-year-old, who has Down syndrome and low muscle tone, was fortunate to transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) when it first trialled in Victoria, in the Barwon region, in 2013.

"The early intervention and the continuity of support the NDIS provides, that whole life-long financial commitment to support Adam, and us as parents, has been priceless," Julie said.

"Adam receives fortnightly speech therapy, occupational therapy, and peer support. It's really helped him to develop and grow and become a valued member or our community."

Heavily involved in sport, Julie said Adam plays Competition Tennis with the Drysdale Tennis Club, loves playing basketball and does regular swimming lessons. In Winter he plays soccer with the Drysdale Soccer Club, and he loves it all.

"Right from Kinder Adam's NDIS supports have helped us to improve his fine motor skills and muscle tone. It supported him to learn how to pick up objects and hold them, like pencils and paintbrushes and throwing and catching balls," she said.

"Back then we also had to get Adam up on his feet, so he was capable of climbing stairs and play equipment. Look at him now. He's in his element playing all this sport and he's thriving!"

Adam also competed in State Athletics in its multiclass division in Melbourne last year and competed in the Interschool Cross Country.

"He got a real buzz out of it. He loved it. We got emotional watching him," Julie said.

"He ran the 100 and 200 metres at the State Athletics. I always get a bit worried when he runs the 200 and comes around the bend. He sometimes can't quite work out which lane he needs to be in. He could end up in any lane by the finish line. It just adds another element of surprise," she added with a laugh.

Turns out Adam's a bit of a celebrity around his community too. "When we go out, he is recognised.

I feel it’s one of the benefits of living in a small community. Everyone is so inclusive. I feel people have his back. I don’t think we could ever move from the village community and the support we have at Drysdale and on the Bellarine Peninsula. It’s been amazing.”

While academically Adam hasn’t quite reached his milestones, in every other aspect he is achieving, toppling any disability stereotypes, and breaking down barriers in his wake.

Julie credits Adam’s success to his therapists and to Drysdale Primary school for its values on inclusion, learning, and personal development, supporting its students, disability or not.

“There’s that acceptance at Drysdale. He’s been part of the community since he was born and with three siblings, teachers have got to know him so that’s been really beneficial.”

Adam’s speech therapist, Liz, visits the school fortnightly to work one-on-one with him.
Liz also links in with Adam’s teachers, monitoring his progress and she shares various learning techniques, so as a team they can ensure he is fully engaged and stays on track.

“Phil Dunlop-Moore is the school’s Principal for Adam’s journey. He’s been a great support especially given Adam is not at his level academically. He’s always finding ways to promote his successes.

“Phil and Nic Alonso and Kate Wojcik, who form the school’s leadership team, always ensure it feels like an even playing field for all students, where everyone is working on their own personal goals, development, and growth.

“The school has helped to create a really lovely holistic approach when it comes to supporting Adam and it’s reassuring to know he feels really comfortable going back.”
Both working and parenting 4 children, Julie said she, and husband Kevin will always be grateful for Adam’s NDIS funding.

“For Adam, the NDIS came in at the right time. He’s had support at all the right stages and it’s the continuity of his supports that has made the difference,” she said.

“As a family, if we didn’t have Adam’s NDIS funding, we couldn’t afford fortnightly therapies. We might engage supports for a pocket of time, but it wouldn’t be sustainable.
“We are forever grateful of the impact the NDIS has had and continues to have on enriching Adams’ life opportunities.

“As parents, it’s comforting to know Adam has support for life, especially when we’re no longer around. It means he can lead his own life and be who he wants to be,” Julie said.

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