Posted on:
14 September 2023

Rockhampton teenager Joshua didn’t use spoken language until he was 5, now he’s singing at school events, volunteering at a tennis club and has his manual learner’s licence.

But the 17-year-old’s biggest achievement is being able to recognise when he is being bullied and confidently being able to speak up and seek support.

‘People see me as different and I can be bullied for it at school,’ Joshua said.

‘Through help from Phoebe (his psychologist) I have learnt to recognise when this happens and understand it’s not right.’

Born prematurely and fed through a nasal tube for 3 months, Joshua’s mother Deborah said her son never cried and was content to just sit and play.

But that all changed when he turned 2. All communication stopped, he cried 24-hours a day and became a fussy eater.

A year later he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

When he started year 7 at Emmaus College in 2018, Joshua’s anxiety levels were at an all-time high.

The family worked with the school’s learning support team to get support systems in place.

About the same time, Joshua’s paediatrician suggested they apply to access the NDIS.

Joshua was 13 when he received support from Carers Queensland to apply for and implement his NDIS funding in 2018.

He uses his NDIS supports to access psychology, speech therapy and an occupational therapist (OT), with Deborah choosing to take him to appointments to help reduce his anxiety levels.

Since accessing the Scheme, Joshua has learnt how to self-regulate in situations that make him anxious, and an OT has helped improve his sensory issues and selfcare. He’s also learning to cook and to write a resume.

Thanks to NDIS-funded speech therapy, there’s been improvements in Joshua’s articulation and written language skills and he’s gained confidence in starting conversations.

At the start of 2022, Joshua started attending a fitness program where there are NDIS-funded support workers and a small group of young people with disabilities.

‘Joshua has learnt to eat a healthy snack before he goes and has to work out what day of the week it is and if it’s gym, running or swimming,’ Deborah said.

‘He’s made friends and has conversations with the other participants, support workers, the admin team and parents of other participants.

‘Joshua now runs in the Colour Me Capricorn Rockhampton fun run and the Rocky River Run as part of his community access in the program.’

Speaking about his NDIS supports, Joshua said he always had terrible coordination and was often clumsy on his feet.

‘Through OT and playing sport, I have learnt to manage my feet and body and to balance myself and stand tall, shoulders back, because everyone wants to see my handsome smile,’ he said.

‘It’s okay to be me. I am just more aware of fitting in with the world and adapting because the world isn’t changing just because I don’t like things. So, I just accept how it is and learn strategies to cope.’

Deborah said over the years Joshua has developed his sportsmanship skills and now loves playing social tennis and helping 8-year-olds through Matchplay.

‘Joshua was a quiet and shy boy who never lifted his head and ran everywhere so he couldn’t be late,’ she said.

‘Now he is always organised, on time and walks with his head held high and shoulders back.’

Deborah has some heartfelt advice for parents yet to embark on the journey he has undertaken.

‘As hard as it is when your child is young, don’t ever give up. Let them know how much they are loved and wanted,’ she said.

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