

Tracey's Story

Tracey's mother told Tracey's story in a recorded interview. This is the transcript

Tracey was the second born of our three children. She was about six months old when we found out that she had been born with a mild intellectual disability. Living in a farming community as we do, that was not easy for me or my husband to hear.

We just did the best we could and took the advice of the professionals at first. She went regularly to physio and to the occupational therapist for exercises with her hands. We'd just keep putting one foot in front of the other; we didn't really know what to do.

My husband was devastated at the time of the birth and his way of dealing with it was to bury himself in his work outside on the farm. We didn't really feel comfortable about Tracey having a disability and so we treated her as if she didn't.

Consequently, I was the one who was taking Tracey to appointments and hearing about her slowed development. I was the one taking care of her on a day-to-day basis for the first five years.

Partly because I didn't know what to do, and partly because of my own instincts, I started her at kindergym and kindergarten. She seemed to enjoy going there and it provided a sense of normalcy to our everyday life. She loved the staff and they seemed to be good with her. Living in a country area, the small kindergarten could cope with her needs alongside the other children.

When it came time for school I didn't even think about her going to a special school even though there was one in the town. We just sent her to the local primary school which provided education for children coming from the surrounding farming areas.

Tracey attended a normal class but we had special tuition for certain lessons. Class work was a struggle for Tracey; however we put extra energy and money into tutoring her.

Bullying was a problem that we had to deal with as some of the older boys would call her names. I soon got the teachers involved in that situation and together we did all we could to minimise their contact with Tracey without her feeling punished.

She got through primary school and went on to do high school. I noticed that as Tracey grew older she looked a bit more like she had an intellectual disability. But I never let her know that. She was always given lots of attention and praise just as her brother was. I always made sure that she looked pretty and wore the best clothing.

She had some friends from primary school doing the same classes as her in high school. I made sure that she got the same opportunities as other kids so she went on school trips to Canberra and to the snow. I always felt a little uneasy about these trips but I sensed that it was important for her to experience similar things as her friends.

When she left school we weren't sure about what she could do. She had passed high school at fourth year standard with some extra tuition. It soon became clear to us that Tracey wanted to experience work and so we supported her in looking for a job.

We never questioned whether she could or could not manage it. Tracey went to quite a few job interviews but was unsuccessful. In the end Tracey heard about a receptionist job at the local fodder store.

Tracey went for the job interview dressed beautifully and got the job. We were so proud of her and she was so delighted to be a 'working girl'. She still works at the fodder store and now is responsible for doing a wider range of duties. She gets on well with the other office staff and according to her boss she does a good job.

I think Tracey has inherited some of her father's work ethic because she is very enthusiastic about being on time and having her work done before she leaves each day. It's given her a lot of freedom and choice in where she goes and what she buys.

She saved for a little second-hand car and then set about getting her licence. It took a lot longer, but she did it in the end and that gives her a bit more freedom too. We've seen a lot of changes in Tracey since she started work, mostly positive.

In the beginning nobody knew what Tracey could do, but she's proved to us all that with a little support she can do just about anything she puts her mind to. She swims at the local pool once a week and goes for a walk most days after work.

She plays netball during the winter and has made some friends at work with whom she goes out with from time to time. I think it's been important for her that we live in a small community where we know people and feel safe about Tracey going out and about.

We have a big family and we're very family-oriented. We have lots of family dinners and celebrations at birthdays and anniversaries. Tracy has always been included and her sense of humour has always made people laugh. She won't let anybody get away with anything. Her aunts and uncles think she's a real character. She is treated just like any of the other grandchildren.

We don't know what the future will hold for Tracey. I think she would like to have a relationship and maybe that will happen over time. We have always instilled in her to be cautious of people that she doesn't know but I hope we haven't gone overboard and made her too wary of meeting new people. Like all parents, we've just done the best we could for her and the rest is up to her. We've done that for both the other children too.

Tracey's personality and determination have played a big part in her being able to do the things she's done. She is a bright happy person who people are glad to be around. We've seen her get knocked back on things, then try again and again until she gets what she wants—even if it is a little bit different from her original plan.

Looking back, I'm glad we haven't wrapped her up in cotton wool and protected her from life. This way she's learnt things about being social and being responsible in her life. Tracy is very caring of others and for animals. She has a gentle spirit which has flourished with love and support.

Tracey has goals just like everyone else. Presently she is saving for a deposit on a house which she will rent for a while until she is ready to move into it, maybe with a couple of friends. She is a very good saver. I taught her how to budget when she started work. She had a budget tin which she puts money into for her various expenses. She is very careful with what she does with her money.

We are very proud of Tracey for what she has achieved despite the odds. To other parents in similar situations I would say; “Don't listen to anyone else about what to do. Listen to your instincts and to your heart. Love your child as you would any other, and find ways round the obstacles.”

When Tracy was first born it felt like the worst thing we could endure as a family. It confronted all of our values and fears. Tracy showed us the way. Just trust in your child and work to provide the opportunities that he or she needs. They will not be a lot different to what every child needs; love, patience, understanding and a belief in the person that your child will become.

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