

Introduction:

These are talented and highly intelligent young men and women.
They have university degrees, in science and IT.
But they have struggled, some for years, to get a job.

All have stories of bullying, misunderstanding, frustration and hopelessness.
They all struggle with the difficulties of being on the autism spectrum.

Today, they are blossoming because of a program called Dandelion.

Yet this is not their story. This is about their parents; what it's like to know a child's talents, but worry every day about a world that can't see past their children's difficulties.

“The Worry”

Julie Anderson:

Jack was a brilliant student, Dux, got Uni degree everything like that, but applying for work after that, he couldn't do it. It was like he would take, I would write him out a script on what to say, Hello my name is such and such and I'd like to talk to you about this job you have available and he couldn't do it. Picking up a telephone and saying that it came out very mechanical. And he didn't feel comfortable doing that. It depends on what it's like for them, some people have no problem talking on a telephone, some people do. It's just a big worry. You worry for them like how are they going to be in life how will they get by?

Vince Rodriguez:

So hard to know he can do this job or another one; but then you're thinking what the candidates have to go through, the interview stage e.g. how he can handle questions and answer correctly and all of that. That would be a difficult stage and be the wall to stop him going any further.

Cherie Martin:

For Joel it was really tough, the first 15 years of his life, going through a lot of bullying at school, being singled out, quite often find him in corner. He was diagnosed with Aspergers quite late at age of and while he was growing up before diagnosed, he used to, as a mum terrified me, he used to hit his head against the brick wall just to try and get the communication out.

Maria Rodriguez:

Sometimes I have to explain from the beginning the levels of problems with autism, eg, son has very intelligent in some areas but difficulties in other areas, so I have to explain from time he was little to now because its big change, he's overcome so many things.
He doesn't have friends.

“The Uncertainty”

Julie:

Jack hit a wall big time at Uni, and he couldn't continue with it and he couldn't stay on Centrelink benefits because that would've been too hard for him to pick up the phone and apply for 10 jobs per fortnight or whatever they were asking him to do. That was just impossible for him, so he decided to go off all benefits and just focus on trying to get a job.

Vince:

It was bit frustrating because in his mind I finish Uni have degree now so where the job? Can I apply for this job? So we have clear in our mind that he that it would be difficult to find appropriate job for him. He was keen to apply for any job but we knew he not get too far in the application,

Cherie:

But he completed year 12 and did a school based apprenticeship in last two years and even be accepted into University. So getting that far was amazing. However, he made decision early he didn't want to publicly announce he was Aspergers, and when he went to university he chose not to declare it and he didn't get the support and it was a real struggle. Then we moved to Brisbane and having everything change really quickly wasn't easy.

“The Little Things”

Julie:

Because they are a little different, they've got few quirks and things like that, 3 They're very much into their routine. If things are going in a different way it's almost like the sky is falling. So you worry on how people are going to treat, their workmates or their school mates, how they're going to be perceived by them and they also worry about that too, they also have, I think, quite a stigma at times.

Maria:

We still worry about him because there was nothing sure about a proper job, we wanted something permanent for him, something that keep him motivated, something where he could use his skills what he learnt at University.

Cherie:

There was a case when he came home one day and was saying he was being locked in the freezer at work and initially I told him to report it and he said he had with manager but he wasn't doing anything. He ended up on Centrelink payments, still working part time and he wanted to get into IT he just couldn't find a job no-one would employ him and through a lot of the job servicing they'd ask him for interviews a sales person, jobs he would just not cope with, face to face communication all the time!

“The Program: Dandelion!”

Marie to Vince:

We were so happy. Because we knew it was the beginning of something great for him! We were very, very happy.

Vince:

It was like, basically winning the lottery!

Julie:

That was wonderful, absolutely wonderful! It took a huge weight off my mind, off my shoulders, and it was fantastic for him to feel like he had achieved something. It was even more for him, more important for him than getting his science degree! This just made such a difference to him and he could see something where he's got a future now. So it was brilliant.

Cherie:

It was amazing and him overnight it was the independence and really being a mum I don't know whether I was ready for that independence, wanted to keep a bit of control (laughter), but it was relief, just relief. And for me just to feel that he's finally got a job in an area he loves but I've got him to, I've helped him to get him to where he can be. Certainly, I'll help wherever I can but he's a 23 yr old man and he's very independent now looking to move out of home and looking to start a whole new life which is fantastic.

“The Change”

Cherie:

I was so proud the fact that people noticed that Joel was a different person and so proud of him, so proud of him and the fact he can now move forward in a career he enjoys and appreciates and not only that socially he's a changed person. The way he communicates and interacts with people, its amazing it feels like overnight, its been a couple of months but overnight he's a totally different person.

Julie:

And I'll say something else which has been a huge change for him, his social skills have improved, he's actually socialising now, I've been trying to get him to go out and meet with friends for so long and he hasn't really done that. Since he's been working at HP, most Friday nights he goes out with some of his workmates, and comes home late, like you'd expect. He's happy meeting people, he's doing things and I've think I've seen his confidence levels have come, just so good.

Maria:

We feel now he's contributing to be part of family, he gives opinions, he comes and says Mum after work can we do this. Mum now I have money can we buy this? So he feels, I need to save for this and this, he has plans now, makes plans. And I say it's fine (Vince says) Yeah.

Vince:

Before all this happened, I never hear about this program it is so perfect for people like Guillermo, with his condition, so perfect because for some reason they're good at computing and IT, unbelievable that so many, we become aware now, so many people with that condition so good IT programming and all of that. As been mentioned before they do degrees and all of that but always been problems getting jobs because the inability of being able to explain what they know and can do and having this program like this is amazing. The person who came up with this deserves some sort of prize because is amazing.

Closing Voice:

Amazing parents. Amazing Kids. The Dandelion program recognises both and is making a big difference.

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