

MARK



Mark was born at North Shore Hospital on 29 January 1992. When the pediatrician, who kept checking our baby's heart beat, said he might have Down Syndrome, we didn't know what it was. We had arrived in Australia 4 years earlier and our English still wasn't great.

Before we left hospital we were told about early intervention in North Sydney, and when Mark was 5 weeks old we visited Beth Facer for the first time.

We had no family around and none of our friends had babies yet, so early intervention literally became our life line in the first years of Mark's life. Their amazing support, skill level, professionalism and above all optimism, gave us hope that Mark was going to have a good future and together we could help him get there. The small steps were very important to us. Don't sweat the big stuff, just concentrate on what you can do right now to help this little human learn to sit, crawl, walk, draw, talk etc.

What also happened in those early years

was that two mornings a week, when Mark was in group session with Jenny Donoghue, I had the opportunity to form friendships with the other mothers in the group. This was the start to a great network of treasured friendships for our family - and some of Mark's closest friends now are kids he first met at Early intervention.

Being Danish, we are brought up to believe that no other social system in the world can match that of Denmark, so when Mark was 10 months old we packed up and went back to the home country for good. What we found was less than impressive for Mark, and I ended up corresponding with Beth Facer and Jenny Berry via old fashioned video tapes, where I videoed Mark and they gave me exercises to do with him. It worked beautifully. Due to a combination of things in our lives, we ended up returning to Sydney after 13 months away - I was very happy to be back with Early intervention and my friends again!

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Mark's early school life was in a regular class in the local public school. We have many wonderful memories from that time, and we added another set of friends, whom we still have today.

Fortunately Carl and I tend to remember the good stuff over the bad - because some of those days in public schooling was really, really hard, and we wondered if we were doing the best for Mark.

After one poor choice of high school, Mark was lucky to be accepted into St Edmunds School in Wahroonga. This great Catholic high school above all helped Mark to become confident enough to try almost anything at



least once! They taught him, as well as numeracy and literacy, social skills and life skills needed to enter adult life. Those years were very happy years for Mark and for us as parents.

Life is so much easier when you have trust in the people around your children.

After high school, transition to work years were spent with Northside Enterprise Inc - another wonderful organization on the Northern Beaches where we live. In his early 20s, Mark had a series of work experiences, volunteer jobs and sheltered workshop jobs. He has always had work and always enjoyed it, whatever it was.

The last 5 years Mark has worked for Bushlink, which is a company doing bush regeneration, gardening and grounds maintenance services. They also do school inclusion programs, industry work and corporate volunteering.

To say that Mark loves his job is an understatement. He loves the work he does, the uniform, his friends there, the supervisors, but most of all the status it gives him. Mark is a

working man like everyone else and the job he does at Bushlink is meaningful and worthwhile.

We probably didn't think we would end up with two high achieving children like our Mark and his sister, Mia - but we have and we're equally proud of both of them.

There's no doubt in our minds that Mark's journey to his success started at early intervention all those years ago, where we, as his parents learnt that not everything comes easy and by itself. We learnt that both us and Mark often had to work hard and long to achieve a goal. The foundation was laid for us supporting Mark throughout his life. We learnt that success is not always a high mark at your HSC. It is just as important to get on with people, to be willing to learn, to be resilient, to be on time, to be presentable, to be reliable - to be employable!

We learnt to plan and to take one step at a time to achieve a goal.

Happy 40th anniversary and lots of love to EarlyEd from the Jensen family



Diane McLane, inset, and members of Bushlink taking part in bush clearing day

Using nature to nurture

FOLLOWING a successful National Tree Day, Diane McLane from Bushlink talks about how the Brookvale group is using nature to help people living with a disability.

Australia is blessed with both incredible people and a beautiful natural environment for them to live in. Too often though, we fail to utilise these advantages to help those most in need.

At Bushlink, we bring the two elements together to empower people with an intellectual disability to obtain and hold real jobs. Through our work in bush regeneration, gardening and grounds maintenance, we create employment in an industry that always needs more workers.

At the same time, we ensure our workers receive ongoing daily support while getting the opportunity to connect with the natural world in a way that most other Australians won't experience.

The innovative program, run by Northside Enterprise Inc., has been an overwhelming success since it began in 2009. Our employees have a fantastic work ethic and a high attendance rate, and jobs at Bushlink generate self-respect, a high degree of pride and a sense of self-worth.

With the help of our hard workers, we are also having a big impact on bushland in the area.

We also work with schools across the northern beaches as part of our Schools Inclusion Program and help transform school grounds.

Visit bushlink.org.au

