

# ROBERT

My son Robert was born in Brisbane in 1987, a time in which the early intervention programmes there had been taken over by the State government from the Endeavour Foundation, and promptly left to rot in a sea of underfunded bureaucracy. The Queensland Down Syndrome Association attempted to fly a special educator up every so often from Sydney to set up and supervise home programmes, but by our time, this was very irregular. The home based 'teams' of therapists visits were infrequent and often cancelled at the last minute.

Rob's earliest interventions were ad hoc at best, and dependent on my efforts to educate myself from other parents, both in Brisbane and on frequent visits to a program at the University of California, Irvine, which happened to be very close to my parents' home. It was disappointing and distressing, because I had first-hand observation of how well the children were doing who had the benefit of world class early intervention.

Luckily, we moved to Sydney in November 1988, and early the next year, we were able to join the Early Education Clinic in North Sydney for twice weekly sessions. The combination of being able to receive weekly one to one programming, observe the group sessions, and have time to get to know the other parents was like being saved from drowning at sea. I might be using too many 'sea' metaphors here, but it is hard not to sound melodramatic in describing the positive impact the Clinic had on our lives. Such a relief to be able to trust in the advice from experts, and to feel assured that we were doing the best we could for our special little boy. In our time at EarlyEd, support ended when the child started pre-school, which I am happy to hear has changed, because the transition to school is at least as important as early intervention with infants and toddlers.

"...friendships were established that last to this day."

One of the difficulties in having a child born with a disability is that as a parent you imagine all the challenges this child will face throughout his life, from day one. "Take it one day at a time" is great advice, but hard to put into practice. We were very lucky that Rob was a healthy newborn and has continued to enjoy good health into adulthood. However, from the beginning a major concern for me was: would my son develop the skills to make friends, and eventually



the ability to live a happy life apart from his family? It was wonderful that as he attended his sessions at EarlyEd, friendships were established that last to this day.

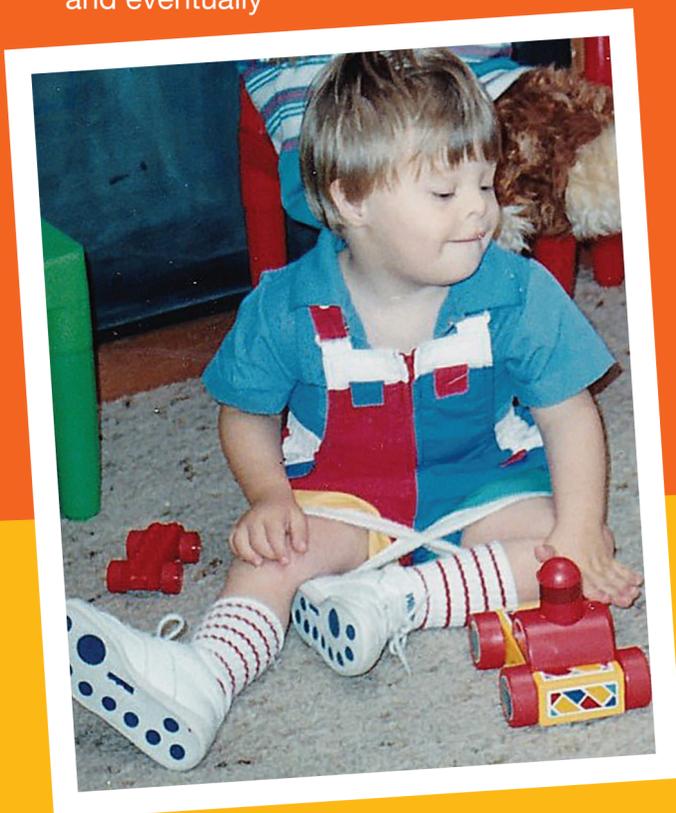
Besides catching up from time to time with friends from all over Sydney, Rob has been sharing a flat for almost 7 years with a delightful young woman that he met at EarlyEd! My advice to new parents: Foster those friendships early on, because you never know where they might lead!

Families in need of the support offered by EarlyEd have the right to expect this kind of service to be provided, but there are never guarantees. Good programmes can disappear all too easily, which is

why EarlyEd is deserving of our ongoing support, as well as from the appropriate government bodies. I congratulate all those involved who have made it possible to be celebrating 40 years of tremendously valuable work for our children.

Rob has been working for Sunnyfield Enterprises, at Chatswood since leaving high school. He enjoys working there. He lives in a flat with Kate (another EEC graduate) and a non-disabled flat mate in Chatswood. He has a VERY active social life, and has been supported by The Housing Connection for six and a half years to live in his own flat.

*Dara, Robbie's Mum*



Celebrating  
**40**  
Years  
1979-2019

**EE**  
**EarlyEd**  
Early Intervention for  
Children with disability