Dream Big!

For young people with Down syndrome and their families
Introduction

We all wish for a life where we are valued and respected, make our own decisions, have friends and loving relationships, grow in our learning, contribute to our community, and follow our dreams and passions.

However, young people with intellectual disability, including those with Down syndrome, often find that their life pathways are mapped out for them, based on low expectations, bureaucratic systems and what is available.

While there are some practical issues that can make it difficult to get and keep a job, one of the biggest challenges for young people with Down syndrome and their families is in raising expectations about what is possible.

This booklet offers opportunities, information, skills and encouragement for students with Down syndrome and their families to dream big and plan to forge new pathways. It aims to raise their aspirations and expectations, and help in preparing for a fulfilling life after school.

We also hope that Dream Big! will encourage and support professionals, including educators, employers, and support services to have a positive approach to their work in helping young people with Down syndrome to prepare for adult life.

The booklet contains positive stories of people with Down syndrome, their jobs and other interests, activities and achievements, how they got where they are and some of the supports they use. There are also some tips from parents and other ideas.

Thank you to the people who shared their stories and photographs for this booklet, their families, the families who took part in a Leaving School survey and to the Commonwealth Non-Government Centre Support Program for funding the project.
Curtis is an adventurous world traveller, actor, surfer, artist, photographer, dancer, musician and more.

Curtis says "Bunbury is home where I belong for 29 years. I want to stay in my community. I am recognised here. I have many facets to my face and participate in the Politician Adoption Scheme.

In the ocean I surf like a dolphin, meeting each wave on my boogie board. Keeping fit is important with regular stints at the gym, eating healthy foods, watching my weight.

I have enjoyed the arts, playing guitar, doing drama, art works with self-portrait and water colour, and dancing. I am aiming for Latin in ballroom dancing with Medal Day in December.

I made a photographic journal called My Trip to Antarctica in a class I attend weekly. I Polar Plunged with forty others from our ship called Sea Spirit in March and have a t-shirt to prove it. I was a bit seasick through the Drake Passage. The water was 3ºC and felt very cold.

I completed the Inca trail in Peru in 2012 and featured in the newspaper. They said I was the first person with Down syndrome to complete the track.

My parents and Local Area Coordinators through the DSC have strongly supported me from birth. Without them I would not have achieved so much. I have travelled extensively within Australia including Tasmania. I flew alone from Perth to Heathrow Airport in 2008.

Inspirational people willing to help me at my pace and continuing to do so are my music and dancing teachers. If living is reaching my potential I have not finished travelling, painting, dancing, acting or surfing. I compete regularly in tenpin bowling in two teams, league and one made up of people with disabilities. To get there I can ride my bike.

My future dream is to see my ex-bowling partner in Grafton.

Anna was awarded the Duke of Edinburgh Award (Bronze level) in 2014, for achieving the requirements in four categories: Adventurous Journey, Service, Skill and Physical Recreation.

Anna says "My dream is to be a successful singer and release an album that is available at the JB Hi-Fi shop and online so all my friends can buy it. I am a really good swimmer and compete in national competitions. I am also really good at dancing because I am flexible and love to dance to music.

Receiving my Duke of Edinburgh bronze award from Prince Edward and the Governor of Western Australia Kerry Sanderson and receiving a message video from the Prime Minister of Australia for completing the award made me very proud.

I cycled the Mundi Biddi trail and camped out for two nights, trained and swam in a national swimming competition and cooked cupcakes for the respite home near where we live. The hard bit was during the cycling as I fell off my bike many times on the first day and then getting back on to keep going. The trail was slippery and gravelly.

The weeks of training beforehand was important as I had to cycle 80 kms over three days. Thanks to Justin my UWA cycle coach, John and Maddie Hughes, close friends who rode with me, Tim my brother who rode with me all the way and also Mum and Dad.

I would like to go to college after high school. I love working with young children so want to work in the early learning field."
Mathew Pegdon 27

Mathew was just 21 when he decided he wanted to move out of the family home and have his own place. Since then, he has shared his home with a few people, but is now living by himself.

He has some support from family and support workers to help him with budgeting, shopping and cooking. He has a budgeting system that helps him manage his weekly money, and his freezer is stocked with meals that Mathew has cooked with his support people, though he enjoys going to his Mum’s house for dinner once a week.

Mathew travels by public transport to his part-time job at Coffee Club, and into the Perth CBD to see his personal trainer three times a week. He is dedicated to keeping fit and developing his physique. Mathew also plays basketball with the Special Olympics and is proud of the photos and medals on display in his house.

Mathew says “I’m good at having my own home and being independent. I’m very proud of my house, my job working in a coffee shop, and keeping fit at the gym.

People who helped me are Mum, Hannah, Dorey, Pania and Noni and my family. They are my team. I would like to increase my working hours, but my biggest dreams are to be in the NBL draft and to be an actor”.

Sarah Wardle 21

Sarah works at the Fiona Stanley Hospital and is a WA Count Me In program ambassador for employment. She enjoys public speaking in this role and at the Perth Penguins Club. She has raised $5,000 for an orphanage in Bali, enjoys dancing, and is looking forward to being part of a dancing demonstration in Melbourne.

Sarah says “I did lots of work experience. I decided I wanted to work in a hospital. About 4 years ago I heard about Fiona Stanley Hospital. I was really interested because it was close to home. We went to the open days and met the HR people and my Dad wrote a letter to the company recruiting staff. Our LAC, Janet Parker was also helping.

My family and I went to The Big Plan with other families to get ideas. Then I got lucky. I was asked to be an ambassador for Count Me In and I said ‘YES please’. Mum and Dad thought this might help me to get a job. Fiona Stanley came to my appointment to the program. I said to Fiona “I’ve been waiting a long time for a job”. Then I got lucky again – Fiona said “Let’s see what we can do” and told the recruiting company “Sarah needs a job”.

And now the really good news – I am now working at Fiona Stanley Hospital and I wear a company scarf as my uniform. I make up kits for induction training and then I ‘Meet and Greet’ new workers. I really enjoy this work. I’d like more time to chat but we are very busy. Later I may help in the kitchen. I travel to work myself by bus and train. It’s not easy for people with disabilities to get a job but we can do it. It has taken a long time and I was lucky that Fiona helped.

My job is like a dream come true. I feel great, I feel good.”

My Advice To Employers is:

• We just need a chance.
• We need a job based on what we can do.
• We can develop into good workers.
• We can all do something.

Tips from Mathew’s Mum Anne:

Don’t do it alone. Mat and I employ an ‘advisor’ or community connector.

Think big about what you want to do and take small steps towards it.

Tread your own path. And, yes, never give up. It’s ok to put the weight of striving down for a while, but gather strength and pick it up again. But most important, don’t do it alone.
Stevo has a part-time job in a timber factory making bed bases and packing cases, but it’s his volunteer jobs at his local school and in his local community shops that he loves most. At school he helped in the pre-primary class even before leaving school, and since then got the opportunity to move with one class right through the school. He is now helping with literacy support and drama with the same group in year 5. He has done work experience at his local IGA since leaving school, and now also works at the local butcher’s shop.

Stevo is also a talented athlete, having travelled interstate and overseas many times to compete in World Down Syndrome Swimming Championships, holding World Champion status many times and breaking World Records. This requires a lot of swimming training, gym work and helps keep him fit, trim and healthy. His swimming journey began with perseverance in the pool, working through swim levels at his own pace, Mum & Dad fronting up to the local swimming club and him joining the local squad. Stevo is also an enthusiastic Aussie Rules fan, and plays with his local integrated AFL team.

IGA is only five minutes’ walk from home, so as Stevo says, “it’s easy to walk to the shops and home again by myself.” At IGA he’s had a go at helping to stack shelves, stacking the fridges, weighing, bagging and labelling the dried fruit and nuts, and he says “I was also a ‘security’ guy” (helping to lock up). He says, “Then I had a go working with the butchers and I love it.”

The butchers chop the meat, while Stevo packs it onto trays, covers with glad wrap, puts on the labels, and then stacks the trays in the fridge. It’s a friendly and welcoming environment with lots of banter and footy talk – and Stevo loves it.

When he said he would like to work in a butcher’s shop, his Mum went to the local butcher to see if they would give him a trial. In true ‘butcher’ style Carlo and Brendan said ‘sure, bring him down’. What a great environment: lots more footy talk and laughing and teasing and charming the customers. Stevo wipes the benches/tiles, sweeps the floor, washes up, helps make sausages, or meatballs or kebabs if it’s happening and puts the meat in paper bags for the customers. On Thursday afternoons at the butcher’s he chooses what’s on the menu for tea and buys the meat before heading home.

Stevo’s favourite part is “talking to the customers and saying ‘hello’”. He also loves talking to people he knows when he’s working behind the counter. “Sometimes I go next door to Rileys and buy cappuccinos for the butchers and for me”.

Stevo’s other dream (perhaps a long-term dream) is to one day be on stage!

I was born to be a butcher!

**Tips from Stevo’s Mum, Cathy:**

- Be on the lookout for things in everyday life that strike a chord or seem to ‘fit’.
- Be ready to find ways of overcoming barriers to doing what you want to do.
- Be bold and ‘ask’ to join in or volunteer or get work experience.
Josie Webster 18

Josie is an accomplished landscape artist, and is the first Australian invited to be a member of the UK Heart and Sold Collective of International Professional Artists with Down syndrome.

Josie says "I’m really good at painting and dancing. My great achievement was being asked to be part of the Heart and Sold Collective. I always feel proud when I have finished a painting and it turns out good. I also feel proud when I read everyone’s comments about my work on my Josie's Art Facebook page".

Josie left school at the end of Year 10 to take up a basic vocational skills course at TAFE. Her Mum enrolled her in a mainstream Art class at the local art gallery in painting and drawing as she had a few free days to fill up. Josie wanted to do pottery at first, but painting and drawing was all that was left, as the others were full.

The first day the art tutor gave everyone a photo of a landscape to draw in pencil, and Josie says, “So I just did what every one else did. The man next to me showed me how to rub my finger over the pencil to get shade effects and my drawing turned out really good for my first time. The tutor and my mum were both very surprised at my talent, as I had never tried to copy landscapes before”.

Steve, the art tutor then taught Josie how to mix oil paint colours. She started to paint a few weeks later and has now done about 16 oil on canvas works. After about six months her Mum set up an art page for Josie on Facebook and put up her work each week.

By the end of the year Josie had about 2000 followers and was contacted by the Heart and Sold Collective in the UK to be part of their group. Some of her works were sent to England where they were photographed and made into limited edition Giclee prints for sale on the Heart and Sold Website. Heart and Sold also represents artist Tazia Fawley who has one of her works hanging in Prince George’s Nursery, so Josie was very excited to be invited to be part of this group.

"I sell prints of my work off my Facebook site along with calendars and T-shirts. I have done a few made to order paintings for relatives and friends when they have given me a photo to copy. I am now concentrating on getting work ready to submit to the exhibitions in London and New York later this year.

It was hard to make the decision to leave school but I was just lucky that I did cause I would never have had this opportunity otherwise!

My mum helps me by taking me to the art gallery every week to work on my paintings and getting my supplies and running my Art page. She answers all the messages on my behalf, but I do write personal thank you cards to everyone that buys any of my prints. My tutor Steve and the other artists at the gallery help me with direction with my artworks each week.

I want to keep painting and I hope I will just keep getting better with practice.

I like to paint places I have visited with my family and I mostly enjoy painting Australian landscapes because the colours of Australia are unique and spectacular. But my dream is to paint a picture of the scarecrow in the cornfield from the Wizard of Oz, because I am good at landscapes but haven’t learned how to paint people yet”.

Here is the link to my Art page. I hope you will like it. www.facebook.com/worksbyjosie

Tips from Josie’s Mum, Julie:

• Always look beyond what the system itself offers and try different things.
• Ask your child what THEY want to do, and go the extra mile to make it happen.
• You are a product of your environment - you will meet the expectations of that environment, whether it’s low or high expectations. Raise the bar!
Nick always wanted to work at Coles and has achieved this goal. He is also an active sportsman, putting in a lot of training to help his football and golf skills.

Nick says “I’m very proud of working at Coles and proud that a video was made to show people what I do at work. I got help from people like Christine from Edge Employment and my supervisors Prakash and JC from Coles help me with my training”. Nick’s mum, Karen, says “Nick got the job through his service provider, Edge Employment, after having been with another provider for two years without getting even close to finding a job”. Edge got an interview for Nick with the store manager at Coles in Claremont, who had employed people with disabilities before and was very supportive. However it took a couple of meetings and some weeks of work trial before Nick was offered a job for two days a week. Edge provided daily support to begin with, and now only drop in fortnightly to see how Nick is going and to help with any issues.

Karen says “The team that Nick works with at Coles are extremely supportive and even though they seem to have a frequent turnover of department managers, so far each one continues to support Nick and offer ongoing training to help Nick improve his skills. Feedback is that his work ethos is better than some of the ‘regular employees’. Nick gets paid a full wage. I think we were really lucky at the time with having a manager that could see the potential in Nick, and gave him a go. He is doing well and finally they have given him some different tasks to do, so he is excited about that.”

Nick is now focusing on living independently. He says “I have been learning to do my own washing and ironing for when I leave home and now I help mum with all my laundry. My dream is to move out of home into my own place. I want to live in an apartment at Claremont Quarter. I would like to be able to catch more public transport on my own”.

Tips from Nick’s Mum, Karen:
• It can be hard, but never give up and constantly be in contact with your service provider if you have one.
• You need to make lots of suggestions to the providers and offer any contacts you may have.

Jack hopes to build his modelling portfolio and take up some modelling opportunities to spread the message of diversity in mainstream media.

Jack’s recent great achievement has been his transition from school to working and his involvement in the community, where he is much liked and valued.

Jack has always loved dressing up, and his Mum, Rosanna, says that though he is quite shy, he likes to go clothes shopping and to be the centre of attention. Jack said he wants to wear a suit for work, as his Dad, Mike does.

Graham Gladman at Inclusion WA arranged for Jack to do a modelling shoot, and when he stepped in front of the camera his passion and talent were clearly evident. The camera loved him and the local Guardian newspaper featured Jack’s modelling shoot on its front page. Jack hopes to build his modelling portfolio and take up some modelling opportunities to spread the message of diversity in mainstream media.

Jack’s other interests include karate. He has been having weekly lessons since he was 11 years old and now has a blue belt. Rosanna says “It wasn’t hard, because he loves doing it”. He is also a great dancer and really good at copying moves.

Jack’s dream is to live independently one day and be in a relationship.

Tips from Jack’s Mum, Rosanna:
• Don’t focus on what people can’t do. Focus on their skills, talents and passions.
• Have conversations about those talents and passions – this is what led to Jack’s photo opportunity.
Tom began riding a motorcycle when he was 16, but his passion for bikes began many years earlier with his first tricycle when he was three years old. Tom progressed through a range of bikes as he grew, and finally dispensed with his trainer wheels when he was 13. His Dad, Martin, thought that Tom would be able to ride a motorbike too, so they bought a small one and within days he was riding and had obtained his competition licence.

Martin modified the bike’s throttle, and it didn’t have gears. Over time, Tom learned to use gears, and his current bike is a regular full sized one. Tom and Martin compete in Observed Trials, which involves standing on the foot-pegs to balance and move around a “section” of ground including high rocks, gullies, logs and other obstacles. Points are deducted when riders put a foot on the ground or fall off. It’s a sport that takes a lot of skill, patience and balance and Tom has developed all of these. He often gets First in his division, and has shelves of trophies and medals. He has even had his name on the Honour Roll for completing events without losing any points at all. As Tom himself says, he’s a “Champion”. Tom and Martin are valued club members, attending other club events as well as competitions, sometimes camping over several days, which Tom loves.

Tom is a man of few words, but this hasn’t prevented other club members getting to know him, enjoying his company and developing respect for his character and determination. Tom says, “I crash!” but he always gets back on his bike. One young man commented, “He stacks it, but he doesn’t complain like a lot of blokes do. He just gets up and back onto his bike again. I really respect him for that”.

Jackie said “Riding helps keep Tom fit, and he gets a huge boost to his self esteem when he tackles and conquers difficult sections, especially when his fellow club members cheer him on and congratulate him. One of the great things about the motorcycle club community is that they now have ordinary expectations of him, just like any other rider”.

Tom works three days a week in a recycling factory, is hoping to do some local volunteer work and is also skilled at kayaking and rowing. His favourite place in the world is Rottnest Island and his dream job is to work in the Rottnest Bakery.

Tips from Tom’s Mum and Dad:
• Tune in to your child’s passion – what is it that motivates them?
• Don’t set limits. Have high expectations.
• You have to work at being part of a club. Help at busy bees, go and help set up for events, take food, go to the social activities, and join people around the campfire.
• If speech is tricky, work on some simple things to help communication between your son or daughter and other club members, such as a couple of simple signs.
• Celebrate every step of the way!
Tips - Preparing for life after school

- Find out what help, financial and otherwise, is available to get a job and do other things such as study and recreation. Gather lots of information. Go to any talks.
- Investigate further education and training options.
- It’s important to work out what the person's interests and passions are.
- Talk about work and what the person would like to do.
- Talk about other things the person wants to do, such as doing more study, playing sport, developing their talents, learning new skills.
- Talk to friends and extended family; find out what their employers do. Maybe you can be introduced, to explore work experience opportunities.
- Talk to older people with disabilities – get their advice, see them as role models.
- Think about skills, including literacy and physical capabilities.

- Do some research, look around, go to expos and open days. Ask your LAC to help find information.
- Have a post-school transition plan and be involved in developing the plan and making sure it is carried out and reviewed.
- Make sure work experience is varied and not just the usual supported employment places some schools use. Give the school some ideas and suggestions.
- Don’t be fobbed off with convenient solutions. Expect more. Be assertive.
- Make contact with parents a couple of years ahead of you – they are a fabulous resource.
- Make sure life after school is part of the family conversations.

No one will ever be as passionate as you are about your child, you know them best.
Tips - Getting a job

- Take the lead.
- Find out what help you can get - Ask a supported employment agency.
- Do some planning and work out what kinds of work you would like and would suit your skills.
- Have a good CV and maybe a One Page Profile.
- Do some volunteer work to develop your skills and add to your CV.
- Think about being self-employed – what would you offer and what support can you get to do it?
- Approach your local shops and businesses and your local council. Ask them to look at the jobs that need doing that would help the organisation and other staff.
- Look at jobs on the internet.
- Use your contacts – lots of people get their jobs through family and friends.
- Do lots of practising for interviews.
- Practise travelling on public transport. You can plan your travel on the internet.

Tips - Keeping a job

- Always be on time.
- Always go to work on the days you are meant to be there.
- Follow the rules.
- Be polite and friendly.
- Be clean, well-groomed and dress to suit the work.
- Be hard working and do your job well.
- Take any training that is provided.
- Don't be afraid to try new things.
- Ask if you have any questions.
- Report anything that is worrying you.
Work out what your interests and passions are.

Do your research on what is available – look at local government directories, local libraries, local newspapers, shopping centre notice boards, ask anyone you know and ask your LAC about information and support.

Contact organisations that focus on community inclusion, such as Inclusion WA.

Practise what you will say when you approach the club or group – be positive, focus on assets.

Follow the rules.

Contribute - offer to help with roles and activities, setting up for events, bring treats to share, take part in busy bees, go to club social occasions. This makes you a real and valued member.