

However, in the same way that the DDA has been exempt from the Migration Act, Australia is also exempt from this article. A conference paper written by Down Syndrome Australia's Migration Agent Jan Gothard states that 'the Australian government also lodged a particular caveat to the convention: namely a caveat to article 18, Liberty of Movement and Nationality, which is the article which pertains to migration'. This caveat ultimately states that while Australia recognises and understands the rights of persons with disabilities and article 18 of the convention, they are not under any legal obligation to follow these laws directly.

Immigration by its very nature is discriminatory. Yet, when we stop to think about it, is it really fair to discriminate against someone purely based on their disability? It's not fair to discriminate on race or gender so why does it seem to be accepted for disability?

My sister Henni has Down syndrome and from the 13 years experience of having her in my life, I can tell you that life is not made difficult by her. Rather she has had a positive impact, not just on every child at her primary school, but on every person she has met. When people find out I have a sister with Down syndrome, the majority of the time they ask three questions: What is Down syndrome? How do you feel about having a sister with Down syndrome? and is it hard? The first question I can easily answer, it's the two latter questions that always stump me. I don't remember what it's like to not have Henni in my life. Of course there are times of difficulty but I have two other sisters as well so I know that having any sister can, at times, be difficult!

I believe that the best way to improve these laws is to allow more people with a disability into this country instead of denying them entry because it could be seen as too hard or too costly. Consequently, we can proudly declare that we have helped break stereotypes and allowed for a more cohesive, understanding and cooperative society.

Frederica is the daughter of Angus Graham, Chairman of Down Syndrome Australia, and her sister Henrietta has Down syndrome.

Being driven to learn

By Anna Brooks

Cailan and I have known each other for many years. Since meeting as classroom teacher and student when she was about nine years old, we have worked together in many ways. She's 23 now and I've had different roles supporting her learning—first as a classroom teacher, then integration aide, then learning coach.

Most of the *learning projects* we have worked on together have been necessary things like school work and self-care skills. But the decision to study for her learner permit was all hers. It seemed like a big project and both Cailan's parents and I were worried about setting her up for a lot of work leading to no reward. Also, the idea of her being successful and being released out onto the road seemed just as daunting! The definition of success in this potential project seemed pretty grey, which goes against the grain of any good educator—we teach with good methods fully intending to achieve clear results.

Cailan persisted in her desire to learn though, and refused to be swayed by our 'it's going to be a lot of work and you might not pass the test' pessimism. So we bought the book and created a plan.

How she did it.

Cailan worked methodically through the learner permit handbook. We studied together for an hour most weeks and she created a journal of *understandings* where she wrote down everything she learnt. Each week I would create a set of questions based on the understandings she had written in her journal, and she'd work through them in her own time.

Some *understandings* in the manual made sense just by reading it together and talking about it. But we often pulled out our trusty 'city roads' play mat and Matchbox cars to act out road rules and scenarios. We drove around our neighbourhood asking things like, 'Why is that sign there?' We studied drivers that were using the roundabout near Cailan's house and compared how cars drove past her house when it was wet or dry. Cailan quickly developed a knack for pointing out when I was about to



go over the speed limit. We used lots of role-play too. Cailan stills rolls her eyes when I remind her of turning the couch into a car, but she did it because she knows my crazy ideas sometimes work!

When she got to the end of the learner's handbook, we started to prepare for the actual test. We downloaded an iPad app that broke up the sections of the test and provided randomly generated questions with multiple-choice answers. Cailan drilled the app in her own time and took screen shots of questions she got wrong so that we could look at them together later. We continued to talk about things we saw happening on the roads by asking questions like, 'What should I do before I change lanes?' and 'Do I need to stop at this pedestrian crossing?' This helped Cailan begin to understand another important driving skill—quick reaction times. Around this time, she also started having driving lessons at an off-road driving school.

We eventually moved to using the official VicRoads practice test website and Cailan would send me photos of her practice test scores. At all hours of the day and night I'd receive text messages with photos of her computer screen—70%, 85%, 96%, 100%. When her scores consistently became high enough to pass, she booked in to do the real thing.

The first time, we booked in at a regional VicRoads licence centre thinking it might be less daunting than the giant, busy city one. It was, but it was also an unfamiliar format: a handwritten test instead of an on-screen test. Cailan wasn't prepared for this and was not successful. The second time around wasn't any better because even though she was consistently doing well on the online practice tests, it wasn't working on that day. For the third attempt we braved the city VicRoads centre to use the computer test programs but Cailan didn't pass by one question! Fourth time lucky and VicRoads arranged for Cailan to sit an 'Assisted Reading' test. With this accommodation, Cailan was able to have the question read to her if she wanted and ask an assistant the definition of any words she didn't understand. The VicRoads staff were very excited to tell her that she'd passed although Cailan wouldn't believe them until they printed out the paperwork that said so!

Two weeks later, her learner permit arrived in the mail. In the two months since, Cailan has started driving lessons



● Cailan with her permit

again and will shortly be on the road with her instructor. She knows it's hard to pass tests and that not everyone can pass a driving test. But for now she wishes to continue learning to drive.

Should she get her Ps?

There are typically many occasions in the life of a person with Down syndrome where people will make decisions for them based on their own beliefs and attitudes. But to pass a driving test, the requirements are unequivocal, the process is clear, and the checks of competency are in place as a standard for all. I don't know if she'll maintain her interest or knowledge of the road rules. I don't know if her reflexes will become quick enough to perform well on the road. I don't know if she can see over the dashboard properly! But I don't have to make those judgments and it would be wrong of me, or others, to do so. There is a transparent system that will do the judging if she wants to try.

But what if she tries and fails?

No one sets out to try new things only if they can guarantee absolute success at the end. Sometimes we try and we fail. Why should Cailan be any different?

But the act of working towards a goal, whether we achieve it or not, can mean gathering new skills or gathering new confidence to tackle bigger and more complicated goals in the future.

Anna Brooks is an independent education and learning consultant based in the outer east of Melbourne. Her background and training is in primary education, expressive therapy, and family and systems therapy. She has been working for over 15 years supporting the learning development goals of students who need adapted curriculum and teaching styles. She can be found on Facebook as WiseAbilities, and on her website- wiseabilities.com.au

