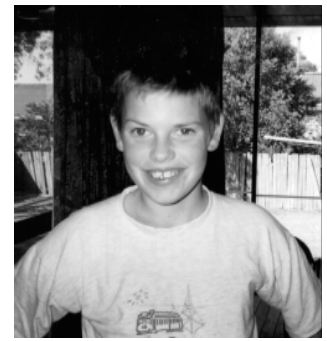


Tim's Story



Tim started life as a 'normal, healthy baby' but at 10 months everything changed. Tim had a prolonged seizure that not only transformed his life but all of his family's as well. This is Tim's story...

Three months after Tim's initial seizure he began to have regular complex partial seizures. This started many years of frequent visits to doctors and hospitals. The diagnosis of Epilepsy with developmental delay was now official. The anti-convulsant 'trial and error' merry-go-round began, and to this day, still continues. Tim failed to keep up with expected mile-stones for his age so the search for early intervention programs started. We soon found out these were few and far between. Tim started in a regular preschool but while staff were very kind they couldn't offer the early intervention and discipline Tim needed. At four he began at an early intervention preschool and soon it was time to look for a kindergarten placement. We found a local school, Harrington Street, with a class that catered for children with moderate intellectual handicaps. We spent time in the class and all agreed that this would be the best option for Tim. Unfortunately the preschool felt he should go to a different mainstream class with support. Being one of 39 children in a class, with only two 20 minute support sessions, Tim failed to cope. The school agreed that they couldn't meet his needs so he spent the remainder of the year at Mainsbridge Special School at Liverpool. This placement was also unsuitable, so the following year Tim transferred to Harrington Street. By the age of six he had been to three preschools and three primary schools! Tim was having many seizures a day and was on five different anti-convulsant drugs. If he wasn't sleeping, he was having a seizure. At this stage his specialist recommended Epilepsy surgery. After much research we decided to proceed with the surgery as Tim's quality of life was very poor. At one point he was having over 90 seizures in a 24 hour period. We travelled to Melbourne for the surgery and while initially successful (Tim was seizure free for four months) he still has seizures daily, but they are not as debilitating as they were prior to surgery. Tim continued at Harrington Street where he improved academically but his lack of social skills caused problems, especially in the playground. When he was in year 5 we started to look at high school options. There was an IO (special ed) class at the local school, but the school had a student population of 1,200. We felt if he couldn't cope socially with 700 students at Harrington Street, then a bigger school would be a disaster. Several classmates of Tim's had transferred to Mater Dei as their parents found that mainstream schools had difficulty coping with their child's special needs. We spoke to the other parents and felt this may also be an option for Tim. As soon as we saw the school and spoke to the Assistant Principal, Pamela Templeton, we felt this would be the ideal environment and that Tim would be able to cope in a school of 96 compared to 1,200. We were fortunate to get a placement the following year. After several teething problems including re-decorating Josephine's (the Taxi drivers) van to and from school and deciding to become a nudist for a week, the transition to Mater Dei has been fairly smooth. Tim is currently in his 5th year at Mater Dei. He has made great progress in all areas especially his social skills. He enjoys the great variety of programs offered at Mater Dei – programs regular mainstream schools are unable to provide. Community access, drama, sport and especially swimming are his favourites. He attends the Residential program two nights a week, learning a variety of skills to help him become more independent (it's amazing how much he can do when Mum's not around!). Even

simple things that people take for granted have to be learned like how to use the telephone. Tim is now able to call us at home with minimal support each week from Residence. Under the caring supervision of the social educators, Tim and his housemates have a great social life and enjoy going out to movies, dinner, ten-pin bowling and shopping, to name a few. We all feel very lucky to be part of the Mater Dei community. It is unique in the programs it offers. Tim feels part of Mater Dei and the entire staff is a credit to the school. They make the children feel special, important and loved, like one great big extended family. Although life with a disabled child can be hard work and frustrating at times, without Tim we wouldn't have had the opportunity to meet so many wonderful, caring and inspirational people who belong to the Mater Dei community.

Narelle & Rod
Tim's Parents

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