

Just call me “diff-abled”

Daniel Pritchard was born with a condition commonly known as ‘Juvenile Retinoschisis’, an inherited disease that causes progressive vision loss due to degeneration of the retina. It occurs almost exclusively in males and there is currently no treatment or cure for the disease. As a result, it is a condition Daniel would have to learn to adapt with as his vision deteriorates over time.

Like many people, the Pritchard family were unaware that Guide Dogs Victoria offered children’s services and it wasn’t until Daniel was in High School that they were introduced to the Children’s Mobility Service (CMS) through the Visiting Teacher Services that the school provided.

Daniel’s safety was the primary concern of his parents Rod and JoAnne. Rod wanted his son to be exposed to as many of life’s situations as possible to achieve independence. JoAnne, who feared that Daniel’s lack of vision put him at risk of injury or worse, wanted to feel comfortable that she could allow Daniel to get about safely unaided.

Taking Daniel’s needs and his parents concerns into account, staff put together a program that would teach Daniel various strategies he could deploy to keep him both safe and independent. JoAnne was invited to watch Daniel’s training and after some initial reservations, she became satisfied that Daniel could safely navigate his way around not only his local neighbourhood, but also the wider areas of Melbourne and the Outer Eastern Suburbs as well.

In June 2008, Daniel attended his first CMS camp program in Bright. Going off on his own with a group of people he was unfamiliar with was a challenge, however on his return at the end of the week, he was mucking around and joking with new friends as if they had known each other for years.

Soon Daniel was ready and raring to exercise his new found mobility skills. He has joined sporting teams in blind cricket and Goalball and often refuses a lift to games, instead researching his public transport options and making his way on his own. His achievements have not gone unrecognised either, with Daniel being named Leader Newspaper’s Junior Sportsperson of the Year and Blind Cricket’s ‘Rookie of the Year’.

.....

Rod says “Dan’s involvement with the CMS has done more than just provide mobility skills, it has changed his outlook and given him a new perspective on life.”

.....

Daniel says he feels it is just as important to be integrated into the blind community as it was to be integrated into the wider sighted community. “It can be difficult for a vision impaired person to make friends and share common interests as we simply can’t participate in a number of the activities that our sighted friends can” explains Daniel. “Now I no longer see myself as a person with a disability, but more someone who just has different abilities. I’m differently abled, or “diffabled” as I like to say”. ● ●

