



Max McLeod

10-40
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We were living in Wollongong when Max was diagnosed. It was first suggested by a speech therapist that Max's problem may be more than just a speech delay. The waiting list for therapies was long, we only had two speech therapy sessions in the space of 5 months. When Max was finally diagnosed it was a bit of a relief after a very hard year. I finally had a direction to go, learn about and find services to help Max.

Not long after Max's diagnosis we decided to move to Queensland. I Googled services in the area we were moving to, Tieri, and was relieved to find the AEIOU website and a section on the introduction of a new rural and remote program in Emerald. I was thrilled after learning that the program would be up and running around the time of our move. I felt so lucky and we just crossed our fingers that Max was going to get a spot. This program was going to be way more involved than anything we could access in the city we were living in NSW. Occupational therapy, speech therapy and specialist help all in one place.

Before AEIOU, daycare was a terrifying place for Max. I would drop him off in hopes of some social interaction and every time I would get a call not long after to come pick him up because he was so distressed and had been crying in the corner since I left. It was obvious that this wasn't working and we needed specialist help.

Since being at AEIOU for six months he loves going to what he calls 'ABC Bear'. Every morning he says 'ABC Bear today Mommy?' and gets upset when I tell him no tomorrow. When I drop him off at AEIOU he is happy to say 'Goodbye Mom' and push me out the door. Now when I come to pick him up instead of a crying overwhelmed child I am delighted with the site of Max sitting with other children and playing bingo or dancing with a big smile on his face, it means the world to us.

Max is a very smart boy and he loves to learn. He likes to add, knows all his planets how to spell them and one fact about each, he can even tell time. He surprises me daily with his intelligence. The big break through however are things that may seem small or come natural to most parents of a 3 year old. Things like Max being able to sit with a group of children and listen to a story, playing a game with another child and not getting upset when they touch him, learning to say people's names and use them appropriately. Having the desire to interact with other people rather than isolate himself in the corner and the biggest breakthrough so far, getting him to wear underwear and go to the potty without being prompted. These are the things that AEIOU have helped him with, that have made a big improvement to his and our life.

We still have bad days, like if we run out of his favourite cereal or I put his shirt on before his pants. He has a lot fewer tantrums now because AEIOU have taught him how to communicate in a more effective way. I know with the efforts of AEIOU over the next year Max will make big gains both academically and more importantly, socially. I am confident he will be able to go into a mainstream Prep class and be successful, something that may not have been obtainable had we not found this program.

We are so lucky to have access to such a service in such a remote area. We live in Tieri and travel to Emerald (2hr round trip) three times a week to get Max there. It is worth every second in that car to see Max smiling as he is interacting with other children.

BY JACQUELINE BOWEN