

Pearl and Charlie's Story

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

What a year for Master Charlie!

Charlie turned seven in January and this year he celebrated his Birthday in Ireland with family and friends there (his Mum, Pearl hails from Mallow in County Cork). Sadly, Charlie's Nanna Kay passed away quite suddenly on Christmas Eve. It was particularly tough for the family as his Nanna would have celebrated her 70th on the same day as Charlie's 7th (January 4th, 2023) – something she was incredibly eager to do. Charlie, not liking to see people being upset, aimed to console his Grandad too one afternoon by sharing "It's OK Grandad - Nanna Kay is alive again in Heaven!". As our kids tend to do, Charlie has an uncanny way of making people smile and feel better particularly when they're feeling low. Charlie's kindness and compassion, love of learning and reading, willingness to entertain through song coupled with his wicked sense of humour made indelible marks in people's hearts during what was a particularly challenging and mournful time for us all.



2022 was a big year for Charlie – he started Kindy at St Matthew's Catholic School in Mudgee, the same school as his brother Rian (9) attends. He is truly a little pioneer in his own right as he is the first child with Down syndrome to attend the school (children with disabilities are typically 'strongly encouraged' to attend the special education unit of the local public school).

Charlie had a great year and my husband Adam and I are very grateful to his wonderful Kindy teacher, educators, therapists and amazing buddies and friends who made his start in 'big school' incredibly inclusive and memorable. While it wasn't all plain sailing to begin with – open, direct (and on-going) communication as well as clarity of (realistic) expectations made for an all-up truly successful first year. I have to say, St Matthew's surpassed our expectations – we are so grateful.



Charlie has a great sense of humour, adores books, enjoys going to the park, animals, movies & music, sleepovers at his Nannie and Poppy Swords and play dates. Music-wise, he currently loves The Imagine Dragons, Bruno Mars and Ed Sheeran to name but a few. He adores babies (in particular playing 'peek-a-boo' with them) and his warm-heart generally leaves a good impression on both young and old alike. He also loves to do everything that Rian does from playing soccer to backyard cricket – Charlie gives most things a good go.



Highlights for Charlie



The inclusiveness within St Matthews and the wider Mudgee community has been incredible. The genuine love people have for Charlie is apparent and it's all we've ever hoped for as parents. [It also solidified in our minds that moving from Sydney to Mudgee when Charlie was 10 months (Charlie's Dad, Adam is from here) was definitely the right move. Having a strong family support network has been key and we have been very lucky in terms of securing early access to local speech therapists, OTs and physio who have been nothing short of amazing. Accessing (good) paediatricians within the region is hard and so Charlie's paediatrician and ENT specialist are Sydney-based]



The merit awards Charlie received throughout his kindy year and the 'student of the week' award he got in October for adhering to the St Matthew's value of 'courage' made us tear up. His amazing Kindy teacher wrote: "Charlie has been working really hard in kindergarten to develop his reading and writing. Charlie always tries his best to learn new words and read new books. He shows courage and determination, never giving up. He is a beautiful friend and valuable member of KB".



The birthday parties and play dates he was invited to (and initiated) and the wonderful friendships he has made is heart-warming and makes him, and us all, very happy! Long may that continue...



The way the Mudgee community again pulled together for the 2022 'Genes for Jeans' campaign and in particular the incredible day our kids experienced with the local / NSW Police force, PoAir and the Mounted Police was really amazing - we could hardly wipe the smile from Charlie's face.



Getting to his second '100-sight words' book and also receiving a 'most improved' award from his amazing speech therapists was fantastic. It's lovely to see Charlie thoroughly enjoy reading and he revels in the amazing connections he has made with all of his therapists.



Pearl and Adam want to thank you for taking the time to read about Charlie and they're always open to being contacted by families within our Down syndrome community and to offering supportive ears and/or any tips, as needed.