

MACARTHUR REGION

Perfection in mother's eye

MUM'S PRIDE IN HER MUCH-LOVED SON SHINES OUT

Vera Bertola

ONE crisp autumn day last month, Harrington Park mum Caroline Richardson penned one of the most important lists of her life.

She vowed to write 21 things about her cherished son Joshua, who attends Mary Brooksbank School, at Rosemeadow. It would include the good things and the not-so-good.

A mother's love is unconditional, but having a child with severe Down syndrome is a roller-coaster ride of emotions, physical and mental demands, frustrations ... and then, Joshy gives her a toothy smile and her knees go weak with love.

At 8.02am on March 21, Ms Richardson made her first post on Facebook:

"Today is World Down Syndrome Day. I celebrate my beautiful boy for all the wonderful things he has brought into my life.

"Down syndrome is also known as Trisomy 21. I will be putting up throughout the day 21 things that Joshy and Down syndrome have taught me."

Ms Richardson admitted the sentiment was easier than actually writing the list. During the day, she wrote a thought as it came to mind:

"3. They are not always happy all the time. They can get very sad, angry and frustrated, just like you and I."

She shared her knowledge of Down syndrome.

"9. When they are looking for signs of Down syndrome in a baby, they look for certain features as well as waiting for the blood test results. Things like a sandal toe, cinnabar crease in the hand. Most people have a break in theirs but most people with Down syndrome it goes straight across."

A mother's frustration ...

A UNIQUE PERSON

WHAT: Down syndrome affects people of all ages, races and economic levels, it occurs about one in every 860 births

WHY: It is caused by an extra copy of chromosome 21 inside each of the body's cells (Trisomy 21). It is a chromosomal accident

FACT: Each person is an individual, with a unique appearance, personality and set of abilities

"10. Josh is a bit too lazy. He needs a good push sometimes to do things. If he can find a way around something to get out of it he will."

Her concerns ... "11. About once a year sometimes twice a year, Joshy can't walk. It's usually in flu season because he gets a flu virus in his muscles and it hurts too much to stand or walk."

And her pride: "No. 15. Joshy can sign the song *Roar* from Katy Perry."

Ms Richardson, who also has a daughter Jazmin, 5, admitted Joshy's lack of communication skills was his biggest frustration – and ultimately hers as well.

"He has little comprehension and understanding ... when you say 'no' a typical child will understand that; Josh can't get it," she said.

But there are plenty of positives to balance out the frustrations.

"He gives the best cuddles. I call him my koala because he wraps his whole body around you," she said.

Ms Richardson said Joshy also had opened up her life in ways she could never have imagined.

At 11.15pm, she made her final post in what had been another long day.

"No. 21. Perfection."

For Caroline's list in full, visit macarthurchronicle.com.au



Caroline Richardson's life has been enriched by her cherished son Joshy, 8, who has Down syndrome.

Picture: ROBERT POZO

Supporters take solace from posts

"GREAT story! Very inspirational. What a beautiful little boy and family."

MEGAN GELLE

"I remember Caroline's posts ... It really highlighted her love for Joshy, that no disability is the same, that others should just see or focus on one ability and

more importantly that no one should never give up on themselves or each other."

MATT N AMANDA

"What a lovely tribute to your son. Thank you for writing it and sharing it. I am a special ed teacher who teaches a child who has Down syndrome and this lit-

tle treasure brings a smile to my face most days as he moves through milestones. Keep being positive."

TRUEJNR

"An amazing little man and an amazing mummy, nothing more perfect than that."

GLENDAGRABAN
Chronicle Facebook

About Joshy

- 1: Down syndrome: every chromosome has two chromosomes.
- 2: No two people with Down syndrome are the same.
- 3: They are not always happy all the time.
- 4: It is very common for people with Down syndrome to have a lot of medical conditions.
- 5: Developmentally people with Downs can be mild, moderate or severe. Joshy is severe.
- 6: People with Down syndrome can have dual diagnosis.
- 7: People with Down syndrome can work the same as anyone else.
- 8: When Joshy was born he wasn't diagnosed until he was three weeks old.
- 9: When looking for signs of Down syndrome in a baby, they look for certain features as well as the blood-test results.
- 10: Josh is a bit too lazy. He needs a good push sometimes to do things.
- 11: About once a year sometimes twice, Joshy can't walk. He gets a flu virus in his muscles and it hurts too much to stand or walk.
- 12: Joshy has an amazing bond with animals.
- 13: Josh is little for his age. He's eight but wears size 6.
- 14: It may take a bit longer but our children can do things, with a lot more hard work and determination.
- 15: Joshy can sign the song *Roar* from Katy Perry.
- 16: He has only dropped the F-bomb once.
- 17: If you want to win him over, he loves Vegemite.
- 18: Most people with Down syndrome are very restless sleepers.
- 19: People with Down syndrome take longer to process things.
- 20: If I never had Joshy, I would never have had the chance to have the most beautiful friends in my life.
- 21: Perfection.

Michelle Roffe
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