

# A Love Story

(The short story to why “The Platform WA” was created from Marie Williams)

This article is a love story about a mother’s unconditional love for her child.

It starts with giving birth, and how this can end up becoming one of the saddest experiences that you will ever know. All because of public perception. This is how my husband and I were made to feel when our daughter was diagnosed with Down syndrome shortly after giving birth to her.

There were no congratulations. No joyous moments. Just a stunned silence, then the whispers, then the condescending comments. Those were the hardest to take, no offers of support, no encouragement, just...nothing. All because of the way society views someone who has Down syndrome.

From the moment a baby is born or even before they are born, they are judged when they are diagnosed with Down syndrome. They are not seen as worthy of a ‘normal life’, and we as parents are left broken and shattered that our baby is perceived as being less than the ‘perfect baby’, and we are often seen as failures.

We get to exist in a shadow world, because we can’t even dream that our children will be allowed to come into the light, as society doesn’t want them to. Parents who find out they are expecting a child with Down syndrome and don’t terminate, are often looked at with pity.

My journey with Laura has not been an easy one; there are and have been many obstacles, hurdles, and challenges. I spend my time on the computer searching for answers, challenging bureaucracy, resorting to setting up The Platform WA a community support group, to change public perception not only for my daughter, but for others like her and their families. Often I feel like I am going backwards, exhausted and drained, but I push forward because I know it’s worth the struggle. It has to be...

I am still fighting the same battles 21 years later, for the sake of my daughter, purely out of love. There is no greater strength than love. Love makes you strong, makes you find the inner strength that you never knew you had. Yes it is my duty as her mother and I accept that. What concerns me is that in 21 years despite the many advancements, we are still trying to navigate the red tape to services and information. What I challenge you to consider is this, “*would you expect to still have to care fulltime for your 21 year old child?*” Sacrificing your own employment opportunities, further education, social life, and the normality of daily routine that so many people take for granted.

I have met people & organisations that have restored my faith in humanity and have assisted me to enable Laura to develop her skills, become independent and gain open employment. It has not been easy; it has been very challenging and still is. Laura keeps pushing forward, she has to, she has no choice, and she cannot give up. She wants to have that ‘normal’ life that her peers take for granted. She wasn’t given a choice to be born with Down syndrome, she had no control over that. Nobody did.

I keep telling her, it doesn't matter if her staircase has more steps than most people, she just needs to focus on getting to the top. I have told her that she will get there eventually. People need to realise that normal everyday tasks are more of a struggle for her than those without intellectual disability. It would be easy for her to give up, to slowly disappear from the world, hide in her room and view the world from behind a computer.

However, she is a fighter, she is determined to become a role model for others so their journey to be included in society will not be so much of a struggle. Laura may not have had the same opportunities as her peers, but hopefully one day, intellectual disability may be seen just like having a different hair colour, and people in the future with intellectual disability will not have to remain in the shadows.

Laura wants to be a role model for others, for parents and families to have a role model they can actually identify with because they appear in mainstream media. She has a goal, a purpose, a dream and a vision. She has a name, it is Laura. She wants to live and experience life, not just view it from the sidelines. She wants to be included and be part of the normal world.

Our daughter is very lucky as she is currently employed in open employment with Pan Pacific Perth. They have been very supportive and given her a sense of purpose, a sense of belonging as another valued team member. As she gains more skills they will give her more opportunities and more hours of employment. Not every one with an intellectual disability is so lucky. The entire team needs to be part of the journey and assist and embrace the team member who has a disability. The more we see this as normal, the easier it will become to integrate our two worlds. We all have so much to learn from each other, if we could just take a chance at changing these limited perceptions that still exist even today!

I like to think the following quote sums up what humanity is about *"To make a difference in someone's life, you don't have to be brilliant, rich, beautiful or perfect. You just have to care."* (Author Unknown) Everybody has a chance to change the world for the better, for my daughter Laura, and others like her. The first step is to let them in so they can take their place in the real world. To be seen and given the opportunities and education that their peers take for granted. The question is *"Will society let us in? Just how inclusive are you prepared to be?"* *We are one of the last parts of civilization fighting for the right to have an independent voice. Please hear us!"*

I have been pushed out of my comfort zone, have grown stronger, have developed new skills and stepped out of the shadows and into the public arena, because I made a choice to fight so that Laura does not have to stay in the shadow world.

Please help me by sharing our story and our FaceBook page @theplatformwa check out our videos while you are there, we are definitely doing 'more than coffee'!! ☺

*Marie x*

Website coming soon....

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