

## Vanessa Main – Gisborne

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I lived in Hamilton and my son was diagnosed at 5 years old at Waikato Hosp. I knew something wasn't right when at 4 years old he was still in nappies, could only say "mum", the physical attacks on me and his dad were too much to take, not eating anything good (veges, fruit) and nothing green would he eat or drink, running away from home and hiding in cupboards/tables etc.

The first year at school for Scott was the worst experience I had ever been through. I had to leave my course because I had to keep going to the school with change of clothes as he would wet and poo. When he was diagnosed with Aspergers I was devastated but atleast I had something to work on. At the age of 5 he was at a 2 year old level for everything- speech, learning abilities, behavioural, emotional etc One day I got the worst phone call ever saying Scott had escaped from school (he didn't understand boundaries/rules that schools offer), they found him down the road at a playcentre. His teacher was having "stress" leave all the time because Scott was such a handful, he always was "in your face", always me me me! He hated loud noises and would cover his ears and scream, if he was scared he would run under a table and wouldn't come out, when it was "mat" time or assembly time while sitting down he would rock backwards and forwards and if he got excited he would jump and flap his hands (all autistic features).

Towards the end of the year Scott was granted a full time teacher aid which carried him into year 2 at school. He was catching up greatly but the major behavioural problems were still their like biting, hitting, punching, toileting, tantrums etc His speech was a huge barrier that after loads of threapy hes so much better now.

Towards the end 2007 I fell pregnant and then the stress of having a "autistic" child took the toll on dad and he left us. I moved back to Gisborne to be with my family.

Scott started school here, he was now 7 years old and approx 2 and half years behind. Since moving I ahd to start all over again, still to this day I haven't got a teacher aid for him because of funding etc. He still has his days where he wets himself, hes bitten another child, hit another child etc but we are using stragdies to cope with that.

Scott in the last 2 years has been bullied because of who he is- last year it was a serious assault on him which resulted a group of boys ganged up on him, hit him in his genitals with a cricket bat, hands around his neck and punched him. I cried so much that evening because Scott never told me anything, if it wasn't for the principal telling me I would have never known.

Scott doesn't understand emotions too well. Like his "I love you" he says it cos he knows it makes the other person happy but he doesn't feel it.

Scott has allot of eating problems, he sniffs and checks something over fully before trying/eating it. The one thing Scott has had since birth and still to this day at 9 years old is "Scooby Doo". That is his best friend! It goes with him to school as if he gets upset the teachers know Scooby is the only thing that calms him down. One day we lost Scooby and it was like if I had lost my mum. he cried and cried and screamed until I went and found another one. Now I ahve 20 scooby's in the cupboard for emergencies!

It came to the point in 2008 I needed some help, I need someone to talk to, someone whos in the same position or has been- or else I was going to have a breakdown as i was emotionally and exhaustinly drained. So I went to my first ever autism meeting here in Gisborne. From that day onwards I go to every monthly meeting. I have met some wonderful and lovely people who I can call friends. They shared their stories with me, gave advice or contacts who may be able to help me. Just being there made me feel I am not alone in this world, even though I am a single mum with 2 kids, they didn't care. I help out with every fundraising event because I feel not only am I giving something back to autism NZ but also I feel I am helping my son. I have learnt so much from these people on the committee that no book or seminar could ever teach me. My son used to go to YMCA and Barnados school hoilday prog, every day I would get a ph call saying Scott has done this... done that... but since Gisborne Autism has opened up their own one not one complaint, Scott has kids who have the same issues, they play wonderfully together and when I pick him up he is so happy.

School life this year has been great, he is now 9 years old and enjoys going to school. He still has the "bullying" but thankgod one good thing about being autistic he doesn't care and understand if they name calling him etc. He is well manered boy and even though he anoys his class mates they all understand Scott is different and they care and help him. Scott is doing swimming lessons which in 1 term has been moved up a class, he does a sat morning sport in Tee Ball and he loves playing and looking after his sister Emily. Scott is very good at Maths and which he loves, he loves music and dancing. He still has the tantrums/arguments/slamming doors when he doesn't get his own way and even to the point where he tells me "I don't love you" but with Scott in 10 mins he will come back and give you the biggest hug and write you the beautifuliest card that would make any mum cry. But (I have to tell this one) The BIGGEST achievement this year which I am so proud of him, 1 week befor ehis 9th birthday in March he learnt to ride his bike with no training wheels. I felt like the proudest mother ever and the smile and confidence on his face was breath taking.

I don't know what the future will bring for Scott with his many autistic problems, but what I do know is I will never stop fighting for him and his education just so he can live a normal life and be happy and I couldn't have done this without the love and support from autism nz.