

Griffin good news story

Look out Alfie Langer – Griffin’s coming for you

IF GRIFFIN Falknau’s smile could be bottled and sold, he would be a millionaire.

This young man has a smile that is wide, that warms the heart, that speaks pure joy.

And that smile has been on show a whole lot more in recent weeks thanks to the assistance Griffin and his family have received from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Aged 31, Griffin is on the Asperger’s Disorder Spectrum, and in recent years has been experiencing a decreasing quality of life.

His love for rugby league has never diminished however, and every weekend he and his mum Tania head out to the Highfields Rugby League Club – Tania to help out with committee duties with Griffin by her side.

“Saturday is my favourite day,” Griffin says.

“I love rugby league. I love yelling and cheering.”

Griffin doesn’t play the game himself – his mum says he is too scared he might hurt someone if he tackled them – but he watches his brothers play and sells raffle tickets and does whatever he can to soak up the team spirit.

Several months ago however, Griffin received a life-changing opportunity to do more than sit on the sidelines. He completed an online League Safe course, and with the blessing of the Highfields Rugby League Club administration and the help of a support worker, Griffin now dons an official yellow jersey each match and delivers water to the players on the field.

“I do what Alfie Langer does in State of Origin,” Griffin says.

“I get a bit scared doing that in front of all the people.

“But I get to hold the trophy too.”

Mrs Falknau said Griffin’s joy is written all over his face on match days.

“He is so proud to be included in the team, he loves his uniform, he is happy – this is such a reward for him and for us,” she says.

“He is a real member of the team for the first time, and the opposition teams love him too.”

Another benefit that has resulted from Griffin’s new independence is the downtime for his mum.

She is now able to devote her energies at the club to committee work, knowing that Griffin is safe and cared for.

“We have always tried to do our best over the years, but this is something that enhances Griffin’s life so much and makes him feel included,” she says.

“His support worker Jason has become his mate, and Griffin now gets to go into the change rooms with the team and be part of it all.”

When not on the footy field, Griffin keeps busy playing with his dog Fern, doing yard-work, and attending art class.

He is also a talented cricketer, having been a member of the Queensland team in the Lord's Taverners indoor cricket competition which took out the title in 2016.

But when pressed about his achievements, Griffin is modest.

"I'm a bowler," he says.

"But I'm not as good as Shane Warne."

Mrs Falknau praised the NDIS for providing opportunities to those with a disability, and says she is grateful to have the option of self-managing Griffin's support package.

"To us, it's clear that care must be individualised to suit the needs of families," she says.

"Self-management lets us choose and allocate payments to areas that suit Griffin within the NDIS parameters.

"A family can only do so much to maximise experiences for someone they love, but we salute the NDIS for creating a situation that works well."