

## Melissa and Alyssa's Story

PRENATAL AND NEW BABY



**Melissa is the Down Syndrome NSW Up Up & Away Coordinator and Information & Support Officer. She is also mum to 4 beautiful girls including 16 year old Alyssa who has Down syndrome. She shares her story to inspire and encourage others.**

"I was once showing Alyssa a video of a group of mums singing a beautiful song with their children who have Down syndrome. All of a sudden, Alyssa had tears in her eyes and asked me to stop the video. I apologised to her, thinking the video had upset her and asked if they were happy or sad tears? She told me they were happy tears because she loves her name, Alyssa, and that she's glad she's my daughter. She added that she feels so special and loved by our family and expressed the beautiful memories she has of us singing just like the children in the video. We hugged and cried happy tears together.

**I feel so blessed that Alyssa can articulate her deepest feelings and tell me that she knows she is loved.**

I want to share my story to show how wonderful the journey of raising a child with Down syndrome can be and the importance of support from day one!

Alyssa was born on 16th May 2006. We discovered she had Down syndrome (Trisomy 21) shortly after. I didn't know anything about Down syndrome, but I did know I loved my baby very much and wanted to do all I could for her.

A lovely nurse came into our hospital room and gave me an information pack from Down Syndrome NSW and offered to arrange a visit from a parent support team member at Down Syndrome NSW. This visit was the most amazing, supportive and informative welcome to the Down syndrome community my husband Michael and I could have asked for.



**Before this, I didn't even know Down Syndrome NSW existed but I will be forever grateful as the first thing they said to us upon entering our hospital room was, "Congratulations!" She then spoke about her experience as a mum of a child who has Down syndrome and totally normalised the whole situation for us.**

Just seeing her talk so candidly, lovingly and kind to us gave us strength and tremendous hope for the years ahead.

She also talked about her daughter, who was twenty something at the time and her sense of humour. It was so reassuring. She also told us of all the information and supports Down Syndrome NSW offers, supports that I now get to provide in my role with all of my own lived experience to guide me!

In a world that can view the anomaly of having an extra copy of Chromosome 21 as not being worthy of life, holding my baby and having this hospital visit squashed society's understanding of normal. Alyssa is our vnormal and our kind of perfect, she's changed our lives for the better. 16 years into this journey I can honestly say it's been a beautiful one. Yes, parenting has its challenges (we have four beautiful children) and I don't always get it right as a mum... but they are all people first and I've learned that love can get you through any challenge."

