TheInclusionClub

John Armstrong interview transcript

Coaching Matthew has been pretty easy. We undertook the Wacky Wheels program, and that was fantastic. We had Gerda Lanbeck – who was a physiotherapist that we used in association with myself to conduct that program. The beauty and the fun about that, as Christine has identified, was that every kid, irrespective of what ability or disability they had learned to ride a bike. There was not one that didn't learn to ride a bike. That was pretty exciting.

And what that showed was that if all the kids are given an opportunity, some might need a bit more patience than others, then everybody has a good chance to be a good bike rider. The truth is was that this is what was the true motivation and driver of the program. The Matthew Kallir Preece story, in my books, is about integration. Matthew just loves being around the rest of the bike riders. And it is nearly through Matthews involvement that cycling within the ACT (Australian Capital Territory) has been so inclusive of all areas within the disability sector.

The junior Cycling program (JC) that we adopted, Matthew just happened to be there. Even if he was too tired or too cranky, he just stopped and helped one of the coaches. And that was fantastic. So he just happened to be there as part of the crew. What was good about that was that he just became one of the other kids. After the first week all of the other kids just thought that Matthewe was just one of the other kids. Which is the way the world should be.

I've got to say that one of the fun things that I thought was that at Matthews 18th birthday party – here we are sitting with Matthews school friends – and he had a bunch of cycling friends and one of them happened to be going to the junior world championships that year as an elite female cyclist. And some of their friends were there with other kids – and they were just there because they were his friends. And that was a really lovely reflection on

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both Matthew as a kid and the way in which the cycling community have treated Matthew and his experiences.

The beauty about Matthew has been that he has challenged the cycling community all the way through. He couldn't have done it without the drive of his parents – Christine and David are strong in the level of support that was provided. If there is an inclining of an opportunity for Matthew to be as integrated as possible they will work for it. You need that. You need someone to drive it. Someone to make it happen.

But most of the time people are good people and they will just go 'okay, show me how and we can do this'. As a result of that we actually integrated a disability component into the time trial for the junior and womens tour – one of the biggest tours within Australia. It's held in the depths of winter in Canberra, a terrible time to hold it – but it is one of the stronger elite tours for the juniors and the senior women – and we have included a time trial element to that.

It's through that inclusion that another group in Canberra – the Females in Training (FIT) – and Pedal Power ACT – have combined and have worked to enable Tandem riding and we've got a series of Tandems now and they provide further support for people with disability, particularly vision impaired people, in the cycling community. Again, that level of support is there all the way through for those people with a disability – and those without. But I guess the Matthew Kallir Preece story is the story about integration – Matthew is just part of the cycling community and what a great thing that is.

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