

Toby walking towards 2022 deb



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THE Wangaratta District Specialist School (WDSS) has been on the lookout for a full time, onsite physiotherapist to join their staff since 2018.

To date, they have not been successful in finding a candidate, however thanks to the Going Rural Health team, a team within the University of Melbourne, Department of Rural Health, a student-led physiotherapy model has been established to fill the void until they do.

Going Rural Health support allied health and nursing student placements in rural Victoria and rolling groups of students complete some of their required placement weeks at the school with one block of students unable to be on site during 2021 due to COVID restrictions.

Term four has seen, thanks to the easing of government restrictions, fourth year physiotherapy students Jayde Butler and Chantal Smith from Charles Sturt University (CSU) in Albury attend the school as part of their clinical hours placement block.

The pair have worked with supervision from Lindsay Humphries within the inter-professional team at WDSS and have established their



MAKING HEADWAY: Toby Crawford (centre) with fourth year physiotherapy students Chantal Smith (left) and Jayde Butler who have completed their five week block clinical placement at WDSS helping Toby build up his endurance to be able to walk at his deb next year.

PHOTO: Belinda Harrison

own physiotherapy caseload and work within classrooms.

One of the students benefiting from Jayde and Chantal's placement, is 18 year old Toby Crawford who is in his final two years of schooling at WDSS.

Toby was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at eight months after a difficult birth and he has a goal to be able to

walk at his deb next year.

"Toby has hydrotherapy once a week and an exercise program twice per week," Toby's mother, Ruth Crawford said.

"Lindsay Humphries is his private NDIS physiotherapist as well, however the extra hours Toby gets to spend with the onsite students is so helpful."

The youngest of three children, Toby's older sister and brother also did their debbs and with the amazing support of the school and Going Rural Health, Toby will not miss out on the same rite of passage.

"Ruth has been advocating for a full time physiotherapist for us here at the school for years," WDSS assistant principal Alysha Jackson said.

"She is school council president and has been really involved with our school community since Toby arrived in grade one."

"We do have some applications for physiotherapists coming in for next year, however it wouldn't be a full time position, but who knows, maybe when Toby's school-

ing comes to an end we just might get one and it will be thanks to Ruth's passionate advocacy."

"We've been unable to recruit a physio to the school for years and we hope these Going Rural Health placements will help future physiotherapists realise they could work here," Ruth said.

"We are so fortunate to have a school like WDSS with fantastic staff right here in Wangaratta and I just knew that I had to put my hand up and try and help, not just for Toby, but for all the other kids here who could benefit from physiotherapy each day or week."

Toby has received daily physio with the two student physiotherapists working on core and trunk strength and building up his endurance to walk more than a few steps at a time.

Maintaining his strength and balance is so important for his independence and safety.

Toby suffers from fatigue quite quickly, however, it is hoped that he will be able to walk between 80 and 100 metres once it comes to his deb in 2022.

For final year students, their deb takes place tonight at the school and will be a crowning achievement in what has been a very difficult final two years for the students.

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