



An unexpected journey.

Inyoni Bay is the next step in our families journey, one that began in October 2013, when an ASD (autism spectrum disorder) diagnosis was delivered to our family. Bayden was only four at the time and whilst not unexpected the confirmation caused my wife and I some anxiety, confusion and worry.

The next year was spent learning as much as we could about Autism (though our learning continues); the challenges, legalities, and the unwanted revelations of how badly this group has been let down by society itself. Prior to Bayden's diagnosis we knew of Autism, but not much about it, we didn't know that the spectrum was so expansive; one of the first phrases you learn upon joining this community is that "once you have met one person with Autism, you have met one person with Autism".

We also learned that this group was much larger than we thought. Depending on which data and criteria you read, between 1 - 2% of the population have ASD; with many individuals, especially in the older demographic, not diagnosed. We learned about the isolation and discrimination - an 85% unemployment rate, life expectancy up to ten years less than the average, one of the most bullied, segregated, and isolated groups in society which leads to incredibly high mental health and suicide rates. We worried that this was going to become our son's destiny.....

So, we decided that we would do everything we could to help our son experience a better quality of life and hopefully outcomes compared with what the statistics told us might happen. We began navigating the time consuming red tape and far too often endless and confusing paperwork, seeking suitable education and funding support, access to therapy, and of course what we could work with him on at home. Through these early years we also experienced the far to frequent rejections and judgement, in sporting groups and primary private school and about cuts to funding and being placed on waiting lists. The brick walls, discrimination and setbacks were heartbreaking, but galvanised our desire to support him in learning the many life skills necessary to have meaningful employment.

Baydens autism manifests in an ability to myopically focus on what he is doing or watching at a given time, with detailed recall of media, music and problem solving most often associated with video games. However, sensory processing, rigidity in thinking, motor skill coordination, emotional control, social interaction skills including face blindness are challenges that he has to navigate on a daily basis.

For us as parents, the most worrying long term concern for parents of children on the spectrum is the knowledge that over 85% of people on the spectrum live out their lives unemployed, living on benefits, which can often lead to many negative outcomes such as isolation, mental health and physical health issues.

Over the last four years as we learned about our son's autism and researched, read, spoke to experts and other families like us, we decided on a plan that we feel will enable us to provide Bayden with a potential future skillset, job and all of the positive outcomes that employment leads to. To mitigate the risk of our son experiencing discrimination

in the hiring process, colleagues and employers we wanted to establish a business in an industry that firstly might suit his autism but secondly offer a work environment that will be supportive, non-discriminatory but also positively challenging and rewarding that could also encompass some of the complementary therapies often so vital for those with autism to function effectively.

So we have slowly embarked on showing, teaching, training, explaining, reiterating, to him the requisite skills he will need as he grows up, with the aim of training him in 2D animation and to employ him in the business should he so wish. There were hundreds of reasons why we shouldn't try, and thousands of what ifs but ultimately why wait – this venture could benefit our son but of equal importance so many other young adults with autism, who have so much to offer, given the right support and opportunity.

Two years ago as a first step we set up an explainer video business to better understand the industry, skills, skills, training, pitfalls, developments and future outlook – not to mention income generation and workplace opportunities. After two years of learning and producing explainer and educational videos for clients we felt ready to start the process of setting up a working studio as a social enterprise. To this end we set up Inyoni Bay as a Community Interest Company: Inyoni Bay CIC. The name is derived from a combination of a strong love and connection with Southern Africa, Inyoni is the Zulu word for bird, we like to see this as Bayden and other young adults soaring to new horizons. And of course the Bay is our son, our inspiration and the rather unimaginative nickname we have for him.

We hope you will come with us on this journey be it as a young adult on our program, a sponsor, client or supporter.

Paul & Joanna