

Vessal achieves his dream of attending a 'University Class'

Vessal is excited to announce that he achieved his dream of attending a 'university class' on Tuesday night 11th October, 2016. This was a small step towards Vessal's dream of one day studying at University.



Vessal having a coffee on the way to the University of Sydney

Vessal said he was very pleased that people liked the pictures of him attending the 'university class' at the University of Sydney (featured on the NWDS Facebook page).

The 'university class' Vessal attended was about 'Reading Australian Literature'. It featured famous author Debra Adelaide, talking about why she likes the book 'Drylands' by Thea Astley. It was held in the Law School Common Room, Level 4, Sydney Law School, University of Sydney.



Vessal on his way to the room where the university class was held. Following the signs ...

Vessal and Michael (who attended the class with Vessal) would like to share a little of the story about how this dream came true.

Last year Vessal was working on his life strategy with Michael during their regular Tuesday afternoon Flexible Respite shift. Vessal amazed Michael (Vessal is always amazing people!) by telling him that one of his life dreams was to go to University and to study 'reading books & music'.

As a first step towards this dream they went to Western Sydney University's Parramatta Campus, near where Vessal lives. Vessal looked around the university and enjoyed mixing with the students, including having good coffee and lovely food at the Oliver Brown Café. They sat in the Café and used an iPhone to see the courses offered by Western Sydney University and other universities in Sydney.



Vessal enjoyed visiting Western Sydney University. But just sitting in the Café and walking around the student study areas and the library wasn't enough! Vessal made very clear that he wanted to have an experience of attending a real 'university class', so he could see what it was like.

Michael suggested to Vessal that we visit Cossette, Disability Advisor at Western Sydney University. She had an office on the Parramatta Campus and was happy to meet with us. She already knew about the good work of Deborah Gersbach and NWDS. The first thing Cossette did was to encourage Vessal to set up his own email address, as this is essential for attending university. He subsequently did this using an NWDS computer, which was very exciting for Vessal! Cossette also tried to arrange for Vessal to attend some university classes about literature, offered as part of their Bachelor of Arts degree.

But then there was a setback! Unfortunately, Cossette came back to us with sad news! Vessal was very disappointed. Cossette said it wasn't possible for Vessal to sit in on a university class for various reasons, including insurance concerns.

But Cossette did talk about different pathways Vessal could explore for getting into University, including 'College Entry' to UWS, that does not require an ATAR.

Well, that was good news! But applying for Uni was going to take some time, not to mention having to wait on NDIS funding decisions etc.

What was Vessal to do in the meantime? He wanted desperately to sit in on a university class!

Michael suggested Vessal could go to a university class that was open to the public. Many Unis offer these classes (public lectures) from time to time. As mentioned above we found a good one to attend at the Sydney Law School, University of Sydney. But this meant changing our Tuesday shift to the early evening so we could attend. Vessal was keen to go and Mum/Dad and Navpreet (Flexible Respite Coordinator) gave us the thumbs up.

Vessal loved attending the lecture and he was full of big smiles that evening. He listened intently to the lecture which was beautifully delivered by Debra Adelaide. Afterwards Vessal was floating on air! Vessal kept thinking all the following week about how good it would be to attend university classes every day of the week! Following are some more pictures of Vessal sitting in the university class and participating in the class. We also took some great night pictures from the glass walkway at the top of the Law School. This walkway overlooks the city on one side and the university on the other.





The following week Vessal wrote during our regular shift “I [would] like to go to the University all the week and sit in the classes and study reading books (literature) and music. I want to keep learning!”.

Since that special night on 11th October Vessal has been working one step at a time on his Western Sydney University ‘College Entry’ application. We are up to the point where we

need to talk with Cosette again about some of the details. Michael will do that soon via email.

Vessal has also been watching a famous free university class on 'studying books' on Youtube. The class is by a famous teacher. His name is Professor Paul Fry from Yale University, USA (<http://oyc.yale.edu/english/engl-300/lecture-1>). Vessal has been enjoying this online class. Vessal laughs out loud, enjoying the jokes and the lively way in which Paul talks and explains things. You can take a look at the class if you like! But Vessal can't wait until he can attend university classes somewhere in Sydney with people his own age. That is his dream!

Thank you for your interest in Vessal's journey towards his dream of going to University so he can study literature and music.



Some further reflections on Vessal's journey

Vessal has done a host of interesting things over the past couple of years. He has enjoyed coming up with ideas by himself of things to do, and then doing them! (with the support of NWDS staff).

The things Vessal has done include, to name just a few, climbing up the Harbour Bridge Southern Pylon, flying kites, playing Hockey at Sydney Olympic Park, playing snooker at Blacktown Workers Club, visiting Cockatoo Island on the Rivercat, visiting the NSW Art Gallery and Museum of Contemporary Art, doing Art at Aberdoon House, regular Ball Dancing Lessons at Arthur Murray Dance Studios in Parramatta and bush walking in the Blue Mountains.

Excitingly, those working with Vessal this year have noticed that he has focused more and more on several key interests and goals.

- He is very interested in creative dance.
- He likes swimming on Fridays
- He wants to have a real job and to make money, working preferably in a major brand supermarket like Woolworths.
- He wants to learn basic life skills so he can care for himself and carry himself well in public.
- And he is highly motivated to attend university classes with people his own age (and one day be a lecturer himself).

It is pleasing to report that Vessal's program in 2016 has become more and more focused around these interests and goals. The challenge and opportunity in 2017 is to support Vessal on this quest to transform his life and future.

We wish Vessal all the best for his future.