

Collective Document for family of Sammy-Joe

To Maria, Jo and Christian, our group witnessed your stories and we wanted to thank you for sharing your letters and this opportunity to respond. We have come up with some responses, thoughts, images and ideas that struck us from hearing your words while reading your letters and wanted to share them with you all.

Maria, as a mum I was very moved by your letter, your dreams for your family and by the strengths and skills that you have learned as part of your “mum” role. I was impressed by your generosity for the service providers involved in your lives. It cannot be easy to open your home to so many and still remain so positive in your outlook. In my future work with families I will remember your words “we have been blessed with a miracle” and will keep in mind that miracles can happen if we remain open and keep looking.

Maria, when you said ‘having Sammy-Joe and Christian has taught me many things.....patience, tolerance, strength and unconditional love’, I got an image of a mother who values learning through life experience and holds strongly onto what her children have imparted to her. I related to your comment because as a mother of a child with a disability I too value what my life experience has taught me. I will hold onto your words to reassure me when times become tough.

Jo, I was very moved by the strength of your love and concern for your family. Despite your own anguish you can find room in your heart to be a loving father and husband. You have a real strength of character. While I was reading your letter I was reminded about how fathers are often on the periphery of their children’s care. Mothers are at home and are the primary care givers when service providers come into the home. So I was reminded that I must make a special effort in future to include dad in discussions and decisions about family matters.

Jo, when you said, ‘there is no other place I would rather be than with them, growing old beside them’, this comment evoked for me an image of someone who values and is committed to his family through good and difficult times. This stood out for me because I also have this commitment to my family. Your story has reminded me how important it is for families to stick together in good times and especially the tough times.

WOW! Christian I was so impressed by the love that you have for your brother and how you became strong and supportive when you could so easily have stayed the younger brother (who always looks to other members of the family for protection and support). I think that Sammy-Joe is very lucky to have someone who understands him and protects him as you do. Your letter has taught me to never underestimate the strength and resilience of younger brothers and how they can be a champion for other family members.

Christian, there were lots of things that stood out for me in your letter but one thing is when you said about Sammy-Joe, 'I don't like people to tease him, or say things about him, I try and protect him from that', I got a picture of a young man standing tall against the injustices of the cruelty shown to others. This picture of you got me thinking about the great people who stood up against the injustices against humanity, people like Nelson Mandela and Gandhi came to my thoughts. This stood out to me because I don't like people teasing or saying things about my son who has a disability and want to protect him from this. I will take away this picture of you protecting your brother Sammy-Joe as a valuable reminder there are people living everyday lives with this strong value of justice for others.

What stood out for me in the three stories are the value they put on family and the strength they grew as a result of Sammy-Joe. Christian wrote 'it's been hard, but I like being with my family'. Joe wrote 'it hasn't been an easy task, but it has been a journey that I would do all over again if I had to,....I cannot imagine my life without my family'. Maria shared that she will 'go to any lengths to keep them safe, happy, protected and loved, I just want us to be a happy family'.

I was touched by their common vision and determination to be with each other and create a happy family in spite of all the challenges that Sammy-Joe's illness bring. An image of a group of people creating a beautiful mosaic comes to my mind. There's something about the broken pieces that outsiders might not see but this group of mosaic artists seemed to be able to use to create a beautiful mosaic of a family that is happy and protected. Maria talked of how Sammy-Joe and Christian taught her 'patience, tolerance, strength and unconditional love'. Joe talked about watching his sons grow with both pride and sadness – and the challenges and hardship didn't seem to diminish the pride he has over his two sons. Christian talked about being able to understand Sammy-Jo and play with him.

The stories gave me hope that there could be ways of creating a happy family in face of hardship and pain. Sometimes I work with people who care for a family member with a very debilitating disability or a drug addiction and I could feel a sense of despair at times. I'd like to hold these stories in my mind when I work with them and look out for what my clients value and what they hold onto in difficult times.

We thank you all again for sharing your stories and look forward to hearing back from you. We are particularly interested in hearing what words or expressions stood out for each of you from the responses and why.

Kind regards,
Norma, Lowell and Lesley.