

**NICKY'S a NEW MAN**

**OCTOBER 2016**



*Charles, Nicky and Kate, Campaspe News*

Back in March 2010, under the title **LIFE'S FUN** we wrote the endearing story of **Nicky Cobbold** (#1079 on the family tree), a 12-year-old boy in Melbourne, Australia. Here is the next chapter in this extraordinary tale, as told in the Campaspe News on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

**Nicky's a new man. Life at Corop camp has him smiling from ear to ear!**

Nicky Cobbold has endured more than any 18-year-old ever should. Born with Down syndrome, Nicky went under the knife for open heart bypass surgery at the age of two. When he was 10, he contracted leukæmia and underwent chemotherapy for three and a half years. Then, as if that wasn't already enough, two years ago Nicky was diagnosed with Graves' disease, an autoimmune condition which is continuing to attack his thyroid.

But in spite of all the health dramas and close shaves in his life, there is little to stop Nicky from smiling lately. And his new home in Corop – Camp Curumbene – has plenty to do with that. Parents Kate and Charles bought the large recreation camp earlier this year, shifting their belongings – and their lives – from Diamond Creek in Melbourne's outer suburbs. The couple's decision was down to a number of factors lining up at the same time, but finding a job for Nicky after high school was the most crucial.

Whether it's judging a Camp Curumbene's Got Talent show, helping co-ordinate the canoeing activities or simply chatting (and sometimes dancing) with all the primary school groups who come through – Nicky is there, ready and willing. "He's just the most beautiful soul you could come across. He doesn't have a mean bone in his body," mum Kate said. "This camp has been phenomenal for him. We couldn't have made a better decision. But I tell you what, it's fantastic for the kids to have Nicky here. A lot of them have never come across other young people with disabilities before. He's an asset. We haven't just provided him with a job. He's actually a wonderful asset to the camp."

Charles agreed, describing his son as a lover of people. "The camp has been fantastic for him in ways we didn't anticipate, and all our staff and the local community have embraced him," he said. "When his brother came up the other day, he said: 'I don't believe what Nicky is doing'." But the smiles and bubbly personality can disguise the reality of Nicky's journey. "He's been through more than any kid should have to go through," said Kate. And while Kate and Charles' stoicism disguises it well, they too have endured more than any parent should.

Try telling any child – let alone one with Down syndrome – they have cancer and why they must keep coming back for operation after operation. "You go into a different world – the world of cancer," Kate said. "There's a huge amount of support, but a lot less for a child with a disability who has cancer. The staff were fabulous, but having a child with a disability was very difficult because he didn't understand; he didn't understand why people were always hurting him." Fortunately the leukaemia eventually left Nicky's body but Kate knows all too well what could have been. "I have a cancer group with mums whose kids were diagnosed at the same time, and out of five there's probably two kids who didn't make it," she said. "Nicky did make it, but I still worry constantly about his health and about the cancer returning."

After 18 years ingrained in the world of disability and, all too often, the world of the gravely ill, the Cobbolds want to use their position to help those who have walked similar roads to theirs. In the short term they will make it easier for disability groups to stay at their camp by ensuring minimum numbers do not apply. In the long term they want to create an all-abilities playground area while also upgrading accommodation rooms which could be offered to cancer charities for families needing to get away.

"And maybe we could eventually offer a sheltered working environment for kids with disabilities," Kate said. These are high goals but, after years of proving they can tackle any challenge thrown their way, there's little reason to doubt Kate, Charles and Nicky Cobbold can turn it into reality. Camp Curumbene caters to school and non-school groups and has a capacity of 130. To find out more visit [www.campcurumbene.com.au](http://www.campcurumbene.com.au)



*Nicky goes to the Ball*