

In November 2011 Conti Property Group held a fundraising event for our daughter, Isabella. The event was a great success and raised so much more money than we ever dreamed of. More than two years after the event the funds raised continue to have a positive effect on Isabella and our whole family.

Isabella is now 12 years old. She is diagnosed as having a severe physical and intellectual disability of unknown origin. She cannot walk or talk. She has uncontrollable epilepsy and suffers frequent seizures, is tube fed continuously, has a severe hearing loss, is visually impaired and has a number of chronic health issues. She requires 24/7 care and is completely dependent on her carers for all aspects of her personal care, feeding and mobility. We are a single income household, with a mortgage and 3 children. Our low income makes it difficult or impossible to purchase items that can improve Isabella's overall quality of life and inclusion in the community.

We receive some assistance from the government for essential items such as feeding equipment, continence products, wheelchairs, bathing aids and manual handling equipment however we rely on ourselves and charity organizations to purchase equipment to improve Isabella's access to the community and her ability to participate in leisure activities and for things that improve her level of comfort and our convenience in and out of the home. Including Isabella in family activities, keeping her comfortable and providing her with a stimulating environment is a constant concern for us.

Most "special needs" equipment is expensive and charity organizations often have strict guidelines as to what they will assist families to purchase and have lengthy and/or slow moving application processes that have to be completed. We were able to spend the funds raised at the fundraising event on equipment we wanted for Isabella without having to fill out forms, liaise with therapists and wait for months on end for a result. It was wonderful!

Below is a list of the many things we have been able to purchase with the money that was raised.  
We could never have purchased any of these items without your help!

## THANK YOU!

Hippocampe All Terrain wheelchair	\$8,000
Track for mobile ceiling track hoist for loungeroom	\$835
Latex mattress topper with waterproof cover and sheepskin rug	\$945
Custom made Raincoat	\$200
Portable telescopic ramps	\$940
Wheelchair restraints for car	\$915
Nebuliser	\$210
Resmed Pixi Paediatric Bipap mask x 2 @ \$250 each	\$500
Heated tubing for bipap machine	\$160
Power inverter for car	\$80
Bathtub	\$2,595
Landscaping materials for garden	\$700
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$16,080</b>

Please read on for more details on just how each of these things has made a difference to Isabella and our family.

### **HIPPOCAMPE ALL TERRAIN WHEELCHAIR**

A lightweight wheelchair that is suitable for taking into fresh or salt water, over sand and on bush tracks or rough and/or hilly terrain.

Isabella loves playing in water, being outside and going for walks. Before we had the Hippocampe going to the beach meant carrying Isabella all the way from the car down to the water, which was exhausting for us and uncomfortable for Isabella. Bushwalking was impossible and going to the pool was incredibly difficult.

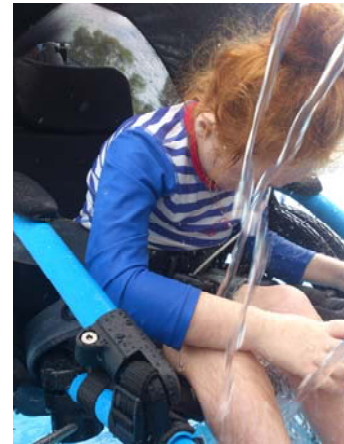
Now we have the Hippocampe we can wheel Isabella straight across the beach and into the water. It's great at the pool as it gives Isabella a safe and supportive place to sit and play in the water and because it is so lightweight it is great for bushwalking. Isabella was also able to enter her school billy cart derby in her Hippocampe last year.



*Bushwalk in the Illawarra*

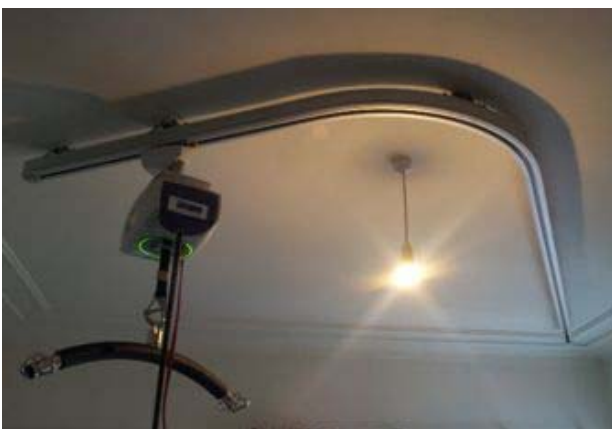


*Splashing around at Jamberoo*



### **TRACK FOR MOBILE CEILING TRACK HOIST FOR LOUNGEROOM**

We have a mobile ceiling track hoist to help with lifting Isabella inside our home. Enable NSW, the government funded organization who supplied the hoist, would only supply straight track and only enough track for use in the bathroom and the bedroom however Isabella spends much of her time in the lounge room either on the floor or on the sofa. We were able to purchase a piece of curved track for the lounge room. We can now easily and comfortably lift Isabella from her wheelchair and either onto the floor or the sofa and vice versa.



*Curved ceiling track*



*Using the hoist to get from the floor to the sofa*



### **LATEX MATTRESS TOPPER WITH WATERPROOF COVER AND SHEEPSKIN RUG**

Isabella likes to lie on the lounge room floor, where she can move herself around a little and be in amongst everyone. Due to her frequent seizure activity and inability to shift her weight effectively Isabella needs a soft surface to lie on so she doesn't get sore or injure herself on our floorboards. We used to place gym mats with a thick blanket on the floor for Isabella however as she got older, heavier and less mobile the gym mats were not providing enough padding and Isabella would quickly become uncomfortable. We were able to purchase a double bed size latex mattress topper with a waterproof cover and a sheepskin rug to put on top. The mattress topper is firm enough that Isabella can easily move around if she wishes, but it is comfortable enough for her to spend the entire day on.



*Comfortable on the floor*

### **CUSTOM MADE RAINCOAT**

We had a raincoat custom made by Megalong Positioning Services that covers Isabella and her wheelchair so she doesn't get wet on the way to the car or when walking. We walk to school as it is only 300 metres down the road and our driveway, local shops, GP and local hospital have no covered parking.

### **PORTABLE TELESCOPIC RAMPS**

Our wheelchair accessible van has a side entry lift. Kerb heights in our area are generally too high to allow us to use the hydraulic lift as the lift is under the car. In such instances we need a manual ramp to get Isabella out. The ramps have also been useful when the hydraulic lifter malfunctions.

### **WHEELCHAIR RESTRAINTS FOR CAR**

The wheelchair restraints in our car were deteriorating.

### **NEBULISER**

We purchased a new nebuliser to replace our 25 year old nebuliser. The new one is quieter and much more efficient.

### **RESMED PIXI PAEDIATRIC BIPAP MASKS**

Isabella is prone to chest infections and uses a bipap machine overnight and when she is unwell to assist her breathing and to prevent and/or manage pneumonia. Since receiving her bipap machine late in 2009 Isabella's hospital admissions for pneumonia have been dramatically reduced and her stays in hospital are shorter. Previously she had used an extra small adult mask but the fit was poor and Isabella would often end up with pressure areas on her forehead and sore red eyes from air leaks. The Resmed Pixi mask is the only paediatric mask currently available. It ends up costing us two to three times as much as the adult mask because we need to replace the whole mask every 12-18 months instead of just replacing parts, but it is so much more comfortable for Isabella.

### **HEATED TUBING FOR BIPAP MACHINE**

For comfort Isabella uses a humidifier with her bipap machine. The heated tubing eliminates the significant amount of condensation that usually builds up in the tubing when using a humidifier. Without the heated tubing Isabella ends up uncomfortable with a very wet nose.

### **POWER INVERTER FOR CAR**

The power inverter allows us to use the bipap machine while transporting Isabella in the car. It is useful for travelling when Isabella is unwell and allows us to take Isabella home from hospital if she still requires the bipap machine during the day but she has no added oxygen requirements. This can mean getting home up to a week earlier.

### **BATHTUB**

We have applied to the New South Wales Home Modification and Maintenance Service (HMMS) to assist with having our bathroom modified to make it more appropriate for Isabella. Isabella loves having a bath but doesn't like showers as she gets too cold in the cooler months. A bath cheers her up when she is sick, stressed or sore, the steam helps unclog her head and chest and it's great therapy as she splashes around a lot. Currently we have a clawfoot bath that is perfect for our needs as we can get our feet under the bath and get right up close to bathe Isabella. In order to modify our smallish bathroom to fit a bathtub, as well as a toilet, shower, sink and change table and maintain circulation space for a wheelchair and other equipment we need a very specific sized bath. After months of searching we found the perfect bath for our needs, it is a one-of-a-kind cast iron clawfoot bath from Old Government House that had been sitting in a backyard in Parramatta. It was found by and is being restored for us by Antique Baths Sydney. The NSW HMMS will not pay for the purchase or installation of a bathtub as part of a bathroom modification so we have purchased the bath, with our fingers crossed that our application for having our bathroom modified is approved.



*The Bathtub, before restoration, with Isabella's bath chair inside. The bath is unique both for its size, it is long and narrow, and the fact that it can be tiled into a corner making it more compact and easier to clean around. It also has extra tall feet which aid us in bathing Isabella and will help when cleaning underneath it.*

## LANDSCAPING MATERIALS FOR GARDEN

Our home and garden were not wheelchair accessible and the only way to get Isabella out into the backyard was to carry her through the house, down 5 rotting steps and then through a garden bed to a scrappy patch of lawn. Years ago we approached the Make a Wish Foundation and the Starlight Foundation for assistance in landscaping our rear yard to make it accessible for Isabella but unfortunately it was not something either foundation could help us with. The NSW HMMS could not help as they do not provide assistance with landscaping and to create ramped access from the back door was impractical as the back door was not wheelchair accessible from inside and the amount of ramping required would have been tremendous.

After 6 years of having no suitable outdoor play area for Isabella we finally have a clear, gently sloping paved path down one side of our house leading to a level area of lawn and a back door leading out to a small deck overlooking the lawn. The total cost so far has been around \$9000, the majority of which has been for materials. Aside from the brick footings for the deck, Ethan completed all the work himself with help from our brother in law. Midway through 2012 we managed to get a grant of \$2000 from Dept of Aging, Disability and Homecare to put towards materials for the landscaping and aside from the \$700 the rest of the money came from us slowly saving. Eventually the house will be wheelchair accessible with the paved path starting level with the front door and continuing all the way through the garden, the deck will be covered and a carport will be put in. The work is not complete yet, but the most important part is done now. It is such a relief!

**BEFORE**



*Rear stairs*



*Side access viewed from front*



*Side access viewed from back*



*Lawn area*

**AFTER**



*Side access viewed from front*



*Side access viewed from rear*



*Path continues down to clothesline*



*Lawn area, deck, back stairs and back door*