

Media Release

21 March 2023

Mum's mission to shine a light on diversity

The mother of a neurodiverse child has penned a funny and heartwarming book based on her son, to help create awareness around diversity and inclusion.

Sunday 2 April is World Autism Understanding Day, aimed to create understanding, acceptance and celebrate life on the Autism Spectrum. Gabrielle Bassett shares the same objective with her first children's book, 'Jack's Best Day Ever'.

Jack, aged 11, attends VMCH's specialist school, St Paul's College, in Kew, along with dual enrolment at a mainstream school. His mum Gabrielle says she'd love to see her book on shelves in schools to help foster understanding among his peers.

"School is a time to really focus on encouraging inclusive behaviours and acceptance of everyone's differences," Gabrielle says.

"The book was designed so a child can just have fun with it and read it for the entertaining story that it is. Or they can sit down with parents or teachers and have a chat about what it means. Why is Jack flapping his hands? Why is he covering his ears? Why is he eating the same thing all the time? It's designed to break down that stigma in a fun and inclusive way."

The colourful and vibrant picture book is a beautifully written tale about the blossoming friendship between two children with disabilities, their preferences, and how they experience the world around them.

Gabrielle says she'd always wanted to write a book, but lockdown was the catalyst to kick-start her dream.

"Lockdown really shone a light on students like Jack. It was a huge challenge at the time as he struggled to engage with the online content and couldn't learn independently. I also realised during this time that on my own bookshelf there was no diversity; no representation of the whole community. When children see versions of themselves it makes them feel seen, loved and accepted for being their true selves."

Jack's principal, Timothy Hemphill, described Gabrielle's book as "a beautiful tribute to Jack".

"Jack is one of the real characters at St Paul's; a born conversationalist. Interacting with Jack is always a joy for me and for everyone around him.

"The depiction of St Paul's College in the book makes me feel extremely proud that Jack in the real world and in this wonderful book has places where he can grow, learn, discover and achieve," Tim says.

"St Paul's is fully committed to celebrating diversity and differences with respect, kindness and fun and Gabrielle's book joyfully does the same. I have no doubt that many children and families will fall in love with this story."

Gabrielle says she'd love to pen another book in the future, featuring her "kind, gentle and helpful" Jack.

"Jack is such a creative individual with a very funny sense of humour ... he's basically writing the content himself!"

Jack's Best Day Ever is now available for pre-order before its release on 1 May. Visit: <https://www.woodslanepress.com.au/collections/author-gabrielle-bassett> and enter GABRIELLE15 at the checkout to receive 15% off the price.

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, compassion, respect and inclusion aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

