

Home where the heart is

Tiffany Fox

6 August 2014

The Dreamhouse. Picture: Supplied

Whether you are striking out on your own, setting up an apartment with mates or braving the uncertain waters of a share house, leaving the family nest is a much-anticipated step on the road to adulthood.

But for young people with intellectual disabilities, living independently can be a hard dream to realise.

The Dreamhouse, by Leederville-based production company Artemis International, sees three young Perth adults with intellectual disabilities tackle the challenges and joys of running their own house.

The everyday tasks of cleaning, grocery shopping and cooking may not seem exciting but for Justin, 32, Sarah, 24, and Kirk, 21, the opportunity to live independently of their parents is a dream come true.

Justin and Sarah both have Down syndrome and while Justin is confident and assertive, Sarah, a practising Christian, is quieter and more conservative.

Kirk is loud, energetic and talkative but his autism makes it difficult for him to build social relationships.

Justin's mother, Margaret, said she had been trying for 10 years to organise suitable housing arrangements for Justin when the opportunity to join The Dreamhouse came along and she was amazed at the changes it had wrought in her son.

Under the auspices of disability specialist Geoff Potter and with the help of "buddies" who assisted them in some of the more difficult tasks, the trio embarked on a huge learning curve as they explored how to manage a house and how to live with each other.

Like housemates everywhere, they partied, fought, flirted, and revelled in the freedom of living in their own home.

"I tell people it is not called The Dreamhouse for nothing, because Justin really is living the dream," Margaret said. "Up until he moved out of home, Justin had never done things he can do now - he had never cooked, he had never gone shopping, he had never handled money.

"The day before he moved out, I took him down to the ATM and showed him what his PIN number was and how to take money out of the ATM, which he had never ever done before, and now he just handles it all himself."

At the end of the six-part series, the housemates were given the chance to continue living together in the house.

Margaret said the local community had welcomed the housemates with open arms and Justin enjoyed his independence so much that she thought he would never return to live in the family home.

"It is a great educator for the viewer because a lot of people tend to underestimate what these people can do, and what their potential is," Margaret said.

"A lot of the issues they have in the house are just what everyone else has and they live their lives like anybody else."

<https://au.news.yahoo.com/home-where-the-heart-is-24642600.html>