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May, 2011

## Hervey Bay Teenager Gets The Greatest Gift Of All

Mel Gibson spoke of it in his epic film *Braveheart*, and it's something most of us enjoy every day without ever realising we have it. Freedom and independence.

Well for one Hervey Bay teenager, that idea has been nothing more than a dream or a notion on the big screen, until now. 17 year old Ryan Bayley from Hervey Bay has been given his first taste of freedom all because he caught the bus.

You see Ryan has spinal muscular atrophy type II, a degenerative condition that means he uses a wheelchair. As a result, public transport has not always been an option for this Australian *Braveheart*. While his family has always looked after him, along with charity MontroseAccess, he had never been able to get himself around independently, until this year. The familiar sound of a bus may not be music to the ears of others, but to this talented young beat boxer, that sound represents his chance to live his own life for the first time.

Ryan said, "If I wanted to see friends or head into town, it would take me two hours in my chair to get there, and two hours home. Now if I catch the bus, I can be there in half an hour. I get to spend so much more time with my friends and it means my parents don't have to drive me around all the time. It took a while to get my confidence up, but I love catching the bus now."

MontroseAccess Social Worker, Cathy Sullivan, said: "Ryan's world has just been opened up entirely and the effect it has had on his overall happiness is just incredible. At first the thought of catching public transport was quite intimidating for him, but not anymore. Ryan has been zipping around the coast to see friends and family."

So what does the youngster do with his new found freedom?

"I just do pretty much what everyone else does. I meet up with my mates, we go into town and hang out, chat, go to the beach, play games, have lunch. It doesn't sound like much, but I haven't always been able to do that. My parents have been great at driving me places, but I am so much happier now because I can do it on my own. It's changed my life." Ryan said.

Cathy went on to say, "What seems like a simple step to many, is actually a hugely significant step in Ryan's world and his family's as well. Living with a disability impacts the entire family, so this achievement that Ryan has made will have a positive spin-off for his entire family unit. And once Ryan sees that he can take more control of his own life, his quality of life will continue to go up, and that is what we set out to achieve."

And independence couldn't have come at a better time. Ryan is a year 12 student, a time when freedom feels as important as studies. It also allows the teenager to pursue his musical passion – beat boxing. He's already been seen on television as he provided the backing beat for MontroseAccess' community service announcement in 2008. He even has a gig booked in for December once his studies are finally finished.

"I've always been interested in music and beat boxing is something that I can do even using a wheelchair. I'm hoping to get more gigs. I'm not sure if I'll be catching the bus to those though, I'll see if maybe my mum or dad can drive me to those ones," Ryan said.

To see Ryan in action, take a look out the MontroseAccess CSA from 2008 by going to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1yEjD-2ad8>

If you would like high res images or to arrange a photo shoot or interview, please feel free to contact MontroseAccess Communications Manager, Adam Harper, on (07) 3717 1184 or 0404 871 360 or email [aharper@montroseaccess.org.au](mailto:aharper@montroseaccess.org.au)

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