

Max snaps up national photographic prize after entry wows judges

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A creative teenager with complex learning disabilities is snap happy after a stunning self-portrait earned him a runners-up spot in a national photographic competition. Max Goulde, 18, who has benefitted from Norwood's services throughout his life, has virtually no voluntary movement, is cortically blind and is unable to communicate verbally. But with the support of a teacher at Max's residential school in Nottingham, he was able to master specially-adapted digital camera equipment and took a photo which wowed judges from charity Sightsavers International's i-click competition 2009.

The theme of this year's competition was 'body language' and Max's photo, which was selected from among hundreds of entries from across the UK, was chosen as Regional Runner Up for the East Midlands (17-18 age category). He was invited to celebrate his success last Friday at an awards ceremony at the Oxo Gallery in London, where his self-portrait will be displayed alongside other winning entries until 10 January.

"The camera, which was set up on a stand, had a very sensitive switch which is triggered by the slightest motion," said his proud father Jack, a surveyor who lives in Hatch End, north-west London with Max's mother, two sisters and brother. "His art teacher at Rutland House spent a long time with him explaining that he needed to lift his head and push the trigger at the same time. It was hours of painstaking work but the result was fantastic."

Organiser Jo Mitchell, of Sightsavers International, said: "It was an excellent photo with an incredible amount of character, and we were all very impressed with the quality of his work."

Max and his family have been supported by Norwood since he was baby, attending its support group for parents of children with disabilities and receiving advice from its social work team. The family also hopes he will be able to take advantage of Norwood's adult services as he makes the transition towards a more independent lifestyle in the coming years.

His father is now a lay leader who sits on Norwood's Operational Services Committee and will represent the Charity on the governing board of the new Jewish Community Secondary School (JCoSS). "The support we've received as a family from Norwood meant we have never been afraid to allow Max to achieve his full potential, whatever that may be," he said. "Also, I know that when I'm not around, Norwood will be there for him. It is very encouraging that there are people there who will enable him to live the life he chooses and fulfill his ambitions."

Every year Norwood enables thousands of people to change their lives, one by one. Norwood supports people with learning disabilities and children and families in need, in the Jewish community and in the wider community.

Sightsavers International works in more than 30 developing countries to prevent blindness, restore sight and advocate for social inclusion and equal rights for people who are blind and visually impaired. For more information visit www.sightsavers.org

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