



18 and beyond

For the average 17-year-old, showering daily and catching the bus on their own would be an everyday occurrence, but for Jay* these are giant steps towards independence and self-reliance.

In care since he was a toddler, Jay never knew a stable home and has been in and out of foster care all his life. Serious mental health issues due to childhood neglect led to aggressive and, at times, psychotic behaviour.

Jay's foster care placements would inevitably break down. Carers struggled to cope with his anger and mood swings and he would take off for days.

Jay missed or refused medications, making his condition worse and setting back his treatment plans. He was anxious and had trouble just getting out the door some days, let alone walking around in public or interacting with people he didn't know. Regular school attendance was impossible.

Right diagnosis, right treatment

When Jay first came to Safe Places for Children, his carers knew a clear mental health diagnosis was critical to getting the right treatment and support for him.

Working closely with Child Youth and Mental Health Services, his Safe Places carers and mental health worker identified a step-by-step plan for Jay, trialling targeted medications and dosages to improve his moods, cognitive function and quality of life.

Now, Jay has come to understand that the medications help him out and he takes his daily medication without fuss. He meets regularly with his mental health worker, knows his triggers and speaks up when he needs more support.

Sticking with our strengths

The Safe Places team knows that every young person has something to contribute and each individual deserves to know their strengths. Jay's carers set up personalised activities based around Jay's love of animals, such as visits to the local RSPCA shelter, and sketching and woodwork.

Like many teenage boys, Jay now can direct his energy into boxing and fitness sessions, helping him feel calmer and more confident. Of course, the X-Box also gets a good workout.

Good routine, good start

For a young person whose entire life has been unstable and unpredictable, being able to set and stick to a daily routine puts Jay on the right path each day. Having breakfast, showering, charging his phone and setting goals for the day with his carers, helps Jay to learn self-discipline and focus.

These days, Jay is rarely absent from home and when he has placements, he stays the week. He shows up for his regular Worklink and Centrelink appointments, even attending regular dental visits for long-overdue dental care.



Jay with one of his best mates

* Name changed to protect privacy

Basic life skills like cooking, cleaning and budgeting give Jay a sense of independence. He regularly plans and cooks healthy, nutritious meals with his Safe Places carers, using ingredients he's picked up on his weekly food shopping trips.

Jay is learning to manage his money, paying down debt though regular fortnightly direct debit payments and setting aside some funds for independent living in the future. He recently took his first bus trip unaided and funded his first weekly bus pass, a critical milestone towards stepping out on his own.

18 and beyond

Jay turns 18 soon and will be legally independent of Safe Places and institutional care, a prospect that used to trigger his anxiety and absences from care.

Now, with Safe Places support, Jay is looking forward to his birthday and beyond with hope and a positive view of the future. He trusts his carers and lets them know when he's upset and needs support. Together, they have visited public places, been swimming at the nearby pool, stopped by the RSPCA shelter and mixed with locals in neighbourhood walks.

Jay knows that he has a Safe Places team behind him, who will help him reflect on his risky behaviours and guide him back on track after a serious wrong turn.

Since coming to Safe Places, Jay is building life skills to live independently. My hope is that, with the right support in place, he'll one day find a long-term job so he can step up and support himself.

Safe Places staff member and one of Jay's former carers

About Safe Places for Children

Founded in 2005, Safe Places for Children provides children and young people in care with individualised therapeutic residential services in Australia and the United Kingdom.

Our talented and passionate team is skilled and experienced in guiding young people towards a better future. If you'd like to help transform a young person's life, contact us on 1300 993 483 or mycareers@safeplaces.com.au