



Supporting families

One of the most rewarding aspects of working with young people overcoming trauma is helping them to rebuild family connections.

Since many young people in Safe Places care experienced severe abuse and neglect in the family setting, it can take years for the right kinship ties to grow and for the young person to trust again. Safe Places has a critical role in supporting the young person's family connections, be it with immediate family members or a wider family network.

Matt* was 13 years old when came to Safe Places, following a period in state care. Like many children in care, he had significant behavioural issues and was being highly medicated for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and thoughts of suicide.

Initially, Matt was continually trying to harm himself, almost on a daily basis, so Safe Places staff were with him around the clock, two at a time. When his care team moved to a one-youth-worker model, this was considered a step forward, though his suicidal ideations resulted in two or three hospital visits each week.

Over this time, only strong and experienced male youth workers formed his core team, though when the hospital visits started to trend down after about a year with Safe Places, his carers felt comfortable introducing female team members.

Reconnecting with family and community

Gradually, as Matt's internal trauma subsided, he began to have more frequent and extended contact with his original family members. He started to attend a church group on Friday evenings, meeting up briefly with his mum and siblings, though his Safe Places carers still needed to be by his side.

In his third and fourth years with Safe Places, he could spend periods over the weekend with his original family, with the Safe Places team as backup when it became too difficult for Matt or his mother to handle. After that, there was a dramatic reduction in



After four years with Safe Places, however, when Matt transitioned out of fulltime residential care and into his own home, flatting with another young man, things started to spiral down. When Safe Places checked in with Matt's mother, she reported that he couldn't cope on his own and had come back to live with her. Despite her best efforts, she couldn't cope with Matt either, as he had fallen into serious drug use. Things were looking bleak.

Taking stock

At this juncture, Matt started to take stock of his life and made the decision to check himself into a drug rehabilitation centre. He said later that he had begun to appreciate the unfailing support his carers had given him. He didn't want to lose the family connections he, his mother and his carers had worked so hard to build over five years.

Although still working through his rehabilitation program, Matt is making great strides. His former carers visit him regularly and he also stays with his mother on a regular basis. He has a fulltime job and is managing the stresses and strains of everyday life.

Matt has come a long way over the past six years. Building back his relationship with his mother and

reconnecting positively with his family has been critical to building his self-belief and helping him to mature. He has publicly thanked his Safe Places carers for what they had taught him and has been part of the Safe Places staff training program, speaking to new youth worker inductees about his experiences.

Matt hopes to work for Safe Places himself one day and is showing an incredible commitment to that goal. He is currently training and gaining as much experience as possible working with young people, so that he can eventually be part of the Safe Places team.

Working closely with Matt's mother and strengthening that connection helped a lot. I hope Matt can build on this and go on to grow a secure family for himself one day.

Safe Places for Children staff member and one of Matt'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