



Safe on the outside too

It says a lot about a young person's past when the only place they feel safe is surrounded by the four walls of their cell. To the point where that young person will assault others just to "get back inside".

It speaks volumes, though, about the care that a young person receives if, within five short months, her most important relationships are with her care team and not just the prison guards who used to open and close her cell door.

At 14 years of age, Tracey* had already spent almost 300 days incarcerated in a juvenile facility, with many of these days spent in isolation due to her extremely violent behaviour. She had no less than six major mental health diagnoses, was not engaging in any form of educational program and was considered an exceptionally high-risk young person.

In fact, when Tracey first came to Safe Places for Children, it was only possible after a detailed safety plan for her and those working with her was agreed between Safe Places and the Department.

Learning to trust

Moving Tracey from detention to a stable home environment was no easy transition, both for her and Safe Places staff. Clearly, Tracey had experienced such deep and profound trauma in her young life, that building trust in those around her was a painstaking process and required great courage and faith from both sides. In Tracey's case, as in so many others, the key was Safe Place's model of assessing the individual and tailoring the care to each person.

In the early months, the staff was lucky if she would string more than two words together, though Tracey would assault them almost daily. It was important to carefully manage Tracey's environment, keeping the home free of potential weapons, such as glass objects, cords, mops, brooms, even paper clips.

Her care team experienced high turnover so that Tracey's area manager was continually recruiting and selecting staff and specialists that Tracey

could respond to and with whom she would build a connection.

Eventually, a core team was built, who listened and acknowledged her feelings, used caring gestures, acted quickly when Tracey knew her mental state was fragile and took her to hospital.

Sometimes Tracey's violent behaviour was triggered by a simple walk around in the community, the unfamiliar environment making her feel unsafe and desperate to head back to her cell again. When she did end up in detention, two members of her care team visited her every day, planned activities for her and told her how proud there were that this time she had stayed outside longer than before.

Her team set Tracey's small goals with rewards and incentives. When Tracey achieved an incident-free fortnight, she earned herself a new pair of Nike sneakers. Now she's working towards a night out at an all-you-can-eat buffet, if she can attend school for 30 days straight, albeit a few hours each time.



Tracey's new Nikes.

Firm footings

In less than half a year in Safe Places' care, Tracey has achieved what many thought impossible. Once a regular visitor, Tracey has only spent seven days incarcerated in the last four months. She no longer assaults her care team and goes on regular outings into the community.

Safe Places is helping Tracey connect with her culture and heritage, bringing some of Tracey's relatives from interstate to visit with her and share a meal, teaching her to be proud of her background.

She has caring and capable female role models in her life and is learning how to present as a young woman, to wear make-up and groom herself.

The walls of the home around her now are filled with positive messages of support on posters and bright, colourful emojis she created herself. With her care team, she refers to the giant map of the world on one wall, understanding her place in the world and gradually feeling more confident about the horizons well beyond her front door.

We never gave up on Tracey. It has been so rewarding to know that she is seeing her life and future in a different way, one with a happy ending. If you spend time with her, you can see Tracey is a smart, creative, chatty and thoughtful young woman. Though we know Tracey still has a long way to go, we are so proud of what's she achieved so far.

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

* Name changed to protect privacy

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