



All for a reason...

Samantha's story

My sister and I grew up in a very moral sort of family. We respected our parents: they worked hard. They didn't drink or smoke or any of that kind of thing. We had a small acreage and my Dad taught me to ride and in the afternoons we would ride together. Mum would come with us sometimes and I remember there were a lot of good things in our family then.

But a lot of those happy times were sort of forgotten because the worst came. I was only twelve when my parents split and my mother left us and things went downhill from there. It's like you have these good memories but then they're sort of stolen.

I'd been in high school a month and a half when it happened. The transition to high school was difficult anyway: I was very shy and lacked confidence. I'd been at a little country primary school with fourteen kids in my class and then I went to a high school that had two hundred kids in the Year. My relationship with my Mum rapidly deteriorated after she left and for a couple of years we barely spoke at all. Her leaving came as a shock for all of us and I think my Dad went through a

care reasons

long grieving stage too. I got severe depression and saw counsellors. When I was fifteen, Dad took me to counselling again. I did sandbox therapy, which I think was good because it helps you realise what you are feeling. I was very withdrawn and didn't want to open anything up. Now if I look back, I can see that. If I was to try and find words that described that part of my life I'd say, 'I was stressed, I was hurt and I was confused.'

I was a pretty bright kid at school and I think if things had been different, I could've done better. In Year 10, I moved out of Dad's and went to live with Mum but at the beginning of Year 12, she told me to leave. I couldn't go home to Dad so I stayed at a friend's house until the counsellor at school referred me to get some youth housing. I think the teachers at school knew I didn't have a family at home (because of when I had to get permission notes signed and stuff like that) but it wasn't something we talked about.

I was virtually working a full time job at the stables and going to school as well and then I got sick with glandular fever. I fell behind badly in class. I just couldn't catch up and it was too stressful and I ended up dropping out in March of Year 12. I started doing TAFE courses and then I fell pregnant when I was eighteen.

It was a bit of a shock. I was sitting talking with an older friend who thought she was pregnant and she was just going through her symptoms and I was like, 'Well, it kind of matches me.' I hadn't thought of it before then. I told my aunty and the father of the baby and then I told my counsellor. I didn't really entertain the abortion idea but I needed to know, for sure, that I could handle having a baby. We went to see someone at the hospital and I listened to her advice but I think I always knew in myself that I could do it: I just needed that reassurance. My relationship with the father ended when Sara was just four weeks

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old. She and I were on our own really, from the beginning.

When we moved back to Coffs, finding housing was really hard. We lived in a caravan park, then at a friend's house and then in emergency accommodation in a motel. I didn't talk to my friends and family much: my friends had never been through it and they didn't really understand what it was like. And families judge you: having a baby young was a bit looked down on, like it was shameful. People have all kinds of ideas about the sort of person these things happen to.

It was nice when I started going to the Burnside playgroup. Sara was about three months old. Some of the girls were so welcoming and it was good to hear what other people had gone through and how they were now going well. When Sara was about twelve months, a real estate agent finally approved us and we were able to start renting our house. Nadine from Burnside Playgroup and my caseworker at *Brighter Futures* helped us so much in getting that to happen. It was just such a relief. We've been here nearly two years now and everything is starting to fall into place.

I've known for a long time that I'd like to be a youth worker (I had an awesome caseworker with Youth Housing), so when the mentoring program came up, I thought a short course like that would be a really good chance to see what that sort of study was like. I thought it would be such a good stepping stone.

In the mentoring course I learnt a lot more about myself and what sort of support I can give to others; especially the skills to understand and deal with tricky

situations. Like what are the appropriate steps and procedures if someone comes and confides in you and wants information? We need to know what we can do and what we can't. I did the Child Protection Course too which is all about keeping children safe and combined with the mentoring course; it really opened my eyes to both sides of it. Sharing my own experiences of domestic violence has given others insights too.

Since I did the mentoring course, I've applied for my Certificate 4 in Community Work and then I can do my Diploma in Youth Work. That's what I really want to do. I want to design programs to help the youth. There's such a need for it and I just want to give something back. I think everything happens for a reason and, you know, I went through this for a reason. I'm a lot stronger person now because of it.

I still see a psychologist and I still suffer anxiety and depression but I'm aware of it now and I know what's happening. I can wait a day or two and go, 'Oh okay: I see, that's what caused it!' And I can manage it.

If it wasn't for the people who helped me, I don't know where I'd be. If I could help just one person in return, I think it would be all so worth it.

I believe that if you try, you can do it. It will happen for you. It's all about keeping positive. You've just got to keep pushing. ●

Sam has been working in retail/hospitality for over six months and now has her own car. While she still has no contact with her mother, her relationship with her father is on the mend.

