



Celebrating Sophia's birthday

Sophia's 16th birthday party is certainly a cause to celebrate. Her life has been turned around with the guidance and support of her long-term carer Dawn and respite carers Becky and James.

Sophia first came to Barnardos when she was nine-years-old after a horrific upbringing. She had been known to DoCS since birth after suffering severe neglect and sexual abuse. Both her parents were chronic drug addicts, leading a chaotic and criminal lifestyle. As a result Sophia displayed extremely aggressive behaviour towards anyone she perceived to be in authority, self-harmed, lied and stole.

During a period of 10 months, Sophia and her brother Reece had seven different placements. The damage done to children who experience so much trauma and instability so early in life can be irreparable. Our Find-a-Family team found her a stable permanent home with Barnardos carer, Dawn. For a long time Sophia struggled to cope and needed significant support from Barnardos and Dawn to enable her to develop into a more confident and secure young person.

When Barnardos decided to separate Sophia and her brother, Sophia felt guilty but also relieved. While living with their parents, she had taken on a parental role as Reece's protector. The lifting of this burden allowed Sophia a catalyst for change and Reece his chance to grow independently. Reece, now 11, has formed a bond with his carers. He and Sophia are closer than ever. The two speak every night on the phone and spend time together most weekends.

Under the care of Dawn, and with extra tutoring Sophia has managed to pass Year 10 and is looking forward to completing her HSC. Barnardos are now working closely with Dawn and Sophia to start implementing a plan for the next stage of Sophia's life, when she turns 18 and leaves care.

Barnardos have provided Dawn and Sophia with guidance and supervision to plan and prepare a pathway for Sophia's future. The plan sets out what help and support are needed including finances, employment, accommodation and the importance of continuing counselling.

Recently Sophia attended a weekend away with a group of other young people who are in Barnardos permanent care. The group had to take responsibility for booking accommodation, planning meals, organising activities and working together as a team towards the success of the weekend. Sophia has struggled with socialising in the past, but during this weekend formed strong bonds with a couple of the other young people and the pictures she took were used in a presentation the group made to their case managers.

Respite foster carers, Becky and James, have played a pivotal role in getting Sophia to where she is today. Being a photographer herself, Becky has inspired Sophia to explore a career in the same field. It was on one of her weekends away with Becky and James that Sophia discovered she had a great talent for photography and now spends many hours quizzing Becky about cameras and different photography techniques. She hopes to go on to study photography at TAFE.

Sophia now has a wonderful group of girlfriends who are coming over to Dawn's to help celebrate her 16th birthday. Although there are still some challenges that lie ahead for Sophia in making the transition to adulthood, Dawn, Becky and James, are all proud of what Sophia has achieved to date. With the assistance of the team at Barnardos they are looking forward to watching her grow into a confident young woman, and continuing to play a role in her life for as long as she needs them.

Is it possible to make friends when you've only known ENEMIES?
We believe it is.