

# Believe.

## Barnardos Australia Newsletter

### Nicole's Story

**What goes through a little child's mind as he watches his father hit his mother with a closed fist? Then push her against the wall and begin to choke her?**

For 10-year-old Oliver, his instinctive response was to protect his younger siblings. Tragically, this poor little boy was so accustomed to the regular violence, he had a 'routine', as his mother Nicole would later tell counsellors.

"Once the violence started, Oliver would round up his little brother and sister and take them into another room," Nicole told her counsellor.

"He'd put on a movie or play a game with them to distract them. I never asked him to do that, but I was grateful. At the same time, I was so ashamed as a mother that I put my little boy in that position."

Nicole tearfully admits that Oliver suffered terribly from witnessing the abuse. "He would start shaking the moment Adam raised his voice: he knew what was coming," she says.

It's a sense of shame that still haunts Nicole today. And a wound that strikes particularly deep for this young mother, as Nicole herself witnessed shocking domestic violence as a child.

She knows the fear of hearing her mother's screams and witnessing her stepfather beat her mother unconscious. Tragically, she also carries many other wounds from her childhood.

Her stepfather, she says, was 'a monster'.

Nicole's stepfather certainly committed monstrous acts on Nicole. When she was a teenager, he was finally jailed for sexually abusing her since the age of six. Despite the conviction, Nicole's mother supported her husband and turned her back on Nicole.

It was a betrayal that haunts Nicole to this day.

Is it any wonder she fled from home and ran into the



arms of the first man who showed her some affection? That man was Adam, an alcoholic who also abused drugs. The violence began when Oliver was nine months old.

The beatings became increasingly violent, but with no family support to fall back on, and living in a small regional area with little community support, Nicole stayed with Adam. Not long after the birth of her third child, police intervened and the children were placed into Barnardos' care.

All three children were undernourished and required medical care but were finally safe with their Barnardos short-term foster carers.

**Two years on, the children have been reunited with Nicole who has since escaped her violent partner: an uplifting story to be told! And it is your support for Barnardos that helped to make this possible.**

**According to 'Domestic Violence NSW', women, children and young people are at increased risk of sexual, domestic and family violence due to isolation from support networks during the COVID-19 crisis.**

# Domestic violence: the lifelong toll on children

**It's a shocking fact<sup>1</sup>: one in four Australian children are exposed to domestic violence.**

Just like Oliver, whose story is featured on the front page, many of these children not only suffer through witnessing and hearing violence, they take on the added burden of shielding their younger siblings from the abuse.

Aside from the immediate trauma, there are potentially life-long consequences for children who witness domestic violence.

Research<sup>2</sup> has shown that witnessing violence changes a child's brain. This is because stress produces cortisol, which adversely affects brain function. This traumatic exposure to domestic violence affects children's emotional, mental and physical health.

Children and young people exposed to domestic and family violence are more likely to: suffer from depression, be homeless, abuse drugs and alcohol, engage in risk-taking behaviours and experience or use violence and be controlling and manipulative in relationships.<sup>3</sup>

A recent Royal Commission<sup>4</sup> into Family Violence found that children could be affected by domestic violence even before they were born.

The Commission heard that, in response to the stress of being harmed, pregnant women release hormones which can permeate the placenta and affect the baby's development in utero. This has potentially severe consequences for the pregnancy and ongoing development of the child.

One of the most devastating legacies of domestic violence is that children who grow up witnessing violence in the home are at greater risk of living in violent relationships as adults: either as victims or as perpetrators.

Barnardos is committed to breaking the cycle of domestic violence through support for families in crisis and early intervention programs. We provide women and children escaping from domestic violence with safe accommodation and the tools they need to heal from trauma and reach their potential.

<sup>1</sup>Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse 2011, The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children: A Literature Review

<sup>2</sup>The effects of domestic and family violence on children and young people. NSW Department of Community & Justice.

<sup>3</sup>How Exposure To Domestic Violence Affects Brain Development in Children | Robyn Chittister October 17, 2016

<sup>4</sup>Victorian Government: Royal Commission into Family Violence. 30 March 2016.

**In 2017-18  
72,000 women and  
41,000 children were  
made homeless due  
to family violence.\***

\*AIHW 2019

If you are experiencing domestic violence, or are concerned about someone who is, contact the National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service on 1800 737 732 for 24-hour confidential support.



# The most important job in the world



To hear more from Ellie scan here



## Bringing up children with no family or friends to lean on can be incredibly difficult.

Our experience tells us struggling parents can feel overwhelmed, isolated and alone and their children's development may also suffer. Barnardos aims to give parents the confidence and skills to better meet their children's needs while developing social relationships within a supportive and connected local community.

Barnardos' Family Support programs provide the tools for mums, dads and carers to be the best parents they can be for their children.

The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters – is just one of these life-changing tools. This home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program empowers parents to be their children's first teacher and fosters parental involvement in school and community life.

With the help of wonderful supporters like you, Ellie and her children are now thriving.

**Ellie moved from Greece to Australia a few years back, but without a network of family support, she struggled with the difficulties of being a new parent.**

"I think I expected it to be much easier," she says. "I didn't realise how challenging kids can be. How they throw tantrums and how you just have to be there to regulate their emotions and help them go through the phases and even teach your child to sleep."

Barnardos provided Ellie with the tools and confidence to overcome her struggles and connect with her community by attending a Supported Playgroup, which encourages children to socialise and learn through play and provides opportunities for parents to interact and participate in courses.

"Just interacting with other mums and having the kids hang out with other kids really helped," Ellie explains. Ellie completed our Circle of Security and Raising Good Kids courses, which teach parents to be mindful of their children's needs and the importance of early childhood development.

"Through these courses, my parenting has changed. Instead of reacting to my child's behaviour, I try to think first: why is this happening? What does my child need?"

She remains calm and puts her children first by using techniques to regulate their emotions when they are angry or frustrated. "It's good knowing that my kids have a good beginning, a good start in life. They know how to calm themselves and control their feelings, which are skills they will need for their whole lives."

# BARNARDOS BUDDIES: THE NEW FACE OF OUR CHILD SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM



## **Our Child Sponsorship program has recently undergone an exciting makeover!**

On this page you can see the adorable characters who are the mascots of our new Barnardos Buddies Sponsorship program.

Sponsoring a Barnardos child is a very special way to show you care about protecting Australia's children from abuse and neglect.

When you become a Barnardos Buddy, you will follow the progress of a real child who represents thousands of others receiving care and support through our many programs. You will hear about the real events in their life and the issues they face on their journey to healing.

You will also receive updates from their Barnardos case worker, which will give you an insight into how your generosity is changing their life.

If you are inspired to do so, you can even write a message of encouragement to your sponsor child. (To maintain privacy and confidentiality, all correspondence is exchanged through our Barnardos Buddies team.)

The Barnardos children who are part of our Child Sponsorship program get a real thrill when they hear from their 'Buddies'. Knowing that someone they have never met cares enough to invest in their future gives these children hope.

**When you sponsor a child, you become a real buddy to a vulnerable child in need.**

**You can become a Barnardos Buddy by committing to a monthly gift of as little as \$30 (that's just \$1 per day).**

**There are three easy ways to sponsor a child today:**

- 1** Sign up online at [barnardos.org.au/donate-now/sponsorship](https://barnardos.org.au/donate-now/sponsorship)
- 2** Email [support@barnardos.org.au](mailto:support@barnardos.org.au)
- 3** Phone our friendly team on **1800 061 000**

**Thank you!**

**BARNARDOS  
BUDIES**



## **Hannah's pain**

**For seven-year-old Hannah, neglect was an everyday reality.**

This timid little girl learnt from an early age not to cry, because she knew that no one would come to comfort her. She often went hungry, searching the empty cupboards for something to eat. No one was around to feed her or tend to her needs. Her parents were so consumed by drugs and alcohol, they had all but forgotten about little Hannah.

Now this precious child is living in a safe and loving home with a Barnardos foster carer.

Tragically, there are many more Australian children like Hannah who are subjected to shocking physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

**Hannah's story is just one example of the many young Australians suffering in silence behind closed doors. Your sponsorship can help change the life of a child like Hannah: from one of suffering to hope.**



# Homework Club



Hear more about the Club, scan now



## Inspiring little learners through the Aboriginal Homework Club:

Thanks to your support, Barnardos is able to go the extra mile for young people in our community. Our Homework Clubs – located in Wellington, Waterloo and Queanbeyan – are just one example of Barnardos' community outreach programs that are having a big impact on generations of young Australians.

The Clubs are focused on improving educational outcomes for children aged 5-12 years by preparing them for a successful journey through primary school.

As well as improving school attendance and academic performance, Homework Club is a safe and culturally appropriate space where children feel they belong and can participate in a range of Aboriginal cultural activities.

Critically, Homework Club is also a place where the children receive a nutritious meal before heading home.

Natisha's children are second-generation Homework Club students: and she couldn't be more proud!

The former student has become a mentor to the current generation of young people attending this unique program.

Natisha is a proud Ngunnawal woman and a mother-of-three and a former student of Barnardos Aboriginal Homework Club.

Today, Natisha's children, Anthony, 10, Bella, 8 and Ethan, 6, all attend Homework Club after school at Queanbeyan West Public School.

"I've been a support worker for Barnardos Aboriginal Homework Club for nearly four years now. I love the kids. Some of them call me Aunty," says Natisha proudly.

"We create a program that includes games, storytelling and other activities that incorporate Indigenous knowledge so the children can connect to their culture in a fun way."

"You can see the difference in the kids because we are consistent. It's the same staff all the time so you see the change in the children's behaviour and the growth in their confidence."

**Over 90% of children who attended Barnardos Aboriginal Homework Club have improved self-confidence, attitudes to learning and academic outcomes.**

**It is kind supporters like you who make this possible, and wonderful people like Natisha who inspire these children to be the best they can be!**



Hear from Troy,  
scan the below



## Troy: giving back to kids like him

Nyngan is a small, isolated town in rural NSW that has been greatly impacted by drought and where mental health amongst young men is a significant concern.

Barnardos youth worker Troy is determined to make sure young men in his hometown do not go down the same path he did growing up.

"I'm probably lucky to still be here with some of the things I used to do," he says.

Troy was bullied quite savagely in his youth. As the tallest and biggest in his group, he would often be targeted in fights and get into trouble sticking up for his friends. He started drinking at the age of 15 and became involved with drugs.

"I did have my own boxing trainer and I was going fairly good at it, then just got involved with drinking and drugs too young," he says.

Thankfully, Troy was able to turn his life around and now runs the boxing program 'Still Standing' from his gym. It was his way of giving back to kids who found themselves in a similar position.

"Still Standing means it's not about how many times you get knocked down, it's about getting back up again."

The boys referred to the program are all at risk of disengaging from school. Long-term impacts of early school leaving include a far greater risk of homelessness and poor lifelong outcomes in health, employment and contact with the criminal justice system. We are happy to report that to date, 100% of the young men who have participated in the Still Standing program remained at school.

"Life has taught me that we all face difficult struggles, whether it's physical or mental issues, but no matter how many times we get knocked down, we have to get back up again. Some will go down the path of drugs and alcohol but what we entrench in them is to never give up on yourself, circumstances will get better, you just have to believe in yourself."

## Look at the impact of your support!

100% of the young men who have participated in the Still Standing program have stayed at school, experienced improved connections with their community... and they report greater self-confidence and a healthier outlook on life.

For more information  
**1800 663 441**

For enquiries or donations  
**1800 061 000**

**[barnardos.org.au/donatenow](https://barnardos.org.au/donatenow)**

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Head Office | 60-64 Bay Street, Ultimo NSW 2007 | GPO Box 9996, Sydney NSW 2001

*In some cases, stock photography used and names changed to protect privacy.*



**Barnardos**  
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