



Profile of a young person at risk. A live changing story.

Case Study of a Young Person cared for by Salvation Army Oasis Youth Support Network, *Surry Hills* est. 1881

Oasis Youth Support Network (OYSN) is The Salvation Army's response to youth homelessness and provides 21 innovative and uplifting programs to help disadvantaged and disconnected young people to start turning their lives around offered at Oasis, in the inner city of Sydney.

My Story. I am 18 years old. I have recently turned my back on a career of crime and violence when I realised that life was worth living rather than wasting it away in a cell.

Gang life had always intrigued me. I was 13 or 14 years when I got mixed up in it and ended up dealing in drugs, doing break-and-enters and armed robberies. My home life with my father and step mum and kids, was aggressive and unsupportive. Sometimes there was violence, but whether it got physical or not, we were always fighting.

I was angry as a teenager and gang life became an outlet for everything I was angry about. I made a lot of money doing it and while I didn't like what I was doing, the lifestyle that came with it was pretty good. I had heaps of money and status amongst my peers. I could do or have whatever I wanted.

One day I was in a holding cell at Parramatta Children's Court.

I was there for various charges including a breach of AVO, aggravated assault, malicious damage and grievous bodily harm. I had a lot of anger problems that I didn't have a handle on back then, but now I do.

As I sat in the holding cell I became furious at myself for getting caught, and I realised I didn't want to be sitting in a cell for the rest of my life. I decided I wanted to embrace life rather than watch it go by.

Other people I knew were in prison. Depending on what they did they were sometimes respected for being put away. If you were locked up as a result of protecting your own, then you got a lot of respect, but if you ended up in a cell for doing something stupid, then people wouldn't care much for you. Either way, I knew I didn't want to be locked up.

I was sentenced to 10 counselling sessions and an 18-month good behaviour bond. Then I had to get out of gang activity. It was difficult and very expensive. I'd been drug running and was considered middle rank in the gang. Because of things I knew and had been involved in I had to pay my way out to stop the gang members coming after me. It cost me \$75,000.

It was pretty hard to give up that life because it was everything I knew – I'd grown up with it. I also had a cocaine addiction, so I was trying to get myself clean of the criminal activity and the drugs.

I was approached by Oasis. They invited me into their Get Skilled for Work program. It ran for about a month and without it I'd still be struggling. It involved a lot of self-awareness, finding out how to deal with people in a good way. Also it was very physical. We were at the gym a lot, pushing ourselves and setting and achieving goals.

I applied for a job as an office administrator at a construction company while I was on the course. I went for the interview and I got it. It was hard to start with, but now that I've been doing it for a while I like it. I feel a lot more as if I've properly earned the money. Now I hope I'll be able to do a couple of courses and push my way through the ranks in construction.