



CLIENT PROFILE

HAPPY EVER AFTER — NOT ALWAYS — BUT PERHAPS ONE DAY

When I was growing up I thought that everyone had a happy ever after ending. I thought I would have one too. Life is not like that though, once things start happening, and people are not always what they should be, or do what they should do. I don't have a happy ever after story to tell.

I don't remember a time when there was not some grandchildren living with me. I don't remember a time when I didn't drink to help me cope and get some comfort in life. I do remember feeling like it was all falling apart, and that I had failed as a grandparent.

In 2008 I started going to the Commission. The Commissioners were full on. They told me they had received reports from agencies like Child Safety Services and Education Queensland, and they knew the details of the reports. I was upset and could not understand why it was their business. They talked to me about attending services in our community so I tried different services. Some were good and some were not so good, depending on the staff and how I was feeling. Although I was annoyed at the Commissioners for knowing my business I kept going back to them, in the beginning because I had to, but later because I wanted to. Sometimes we argued and sometimes I agreed with them, but most of the time we just talked. They know me; they know that I have all the grandchildren and the reasons behind it.

Things got very bad a few years ago. I had been going to the Wellbeing Centre and worked with Child Safety Services to set up a plan. If I was going to have a weekend with grog, we made sure the grandchildren were with relatives and out of the way. I made sure I was out of community. The grandchildren had good school attendance, even winning weekly prizes. I had signed up to Pride of Place and Student Education Trusts, and the yard now had shelter from the hot sun with a gazebo. Out of the blue a very close relative died. I was so upset that nothing made sense, the days stopped having names and the nights were so lonely. Only the grog would fill the hole. I could see the grandchildren

falling away, not going to school, hungry and dirty, but I could not move. One of the Commissioners came to see me at home and asked me to come to the next conference. She said everyone was very worried about me and now Child Safety Services were concerned I was not sticking to my plan. I told her I did not care, but still I attended the conference.

I had not spoken about the passing to anyone, but looking at the Commissioners I knew it was time. I am sure I stayed much longer than my allocated time, but nobody hurried me, they just listened. We all cried just a little and they felt my pain. At the end we discussed how important the grandchildren are, and that I must look after them as my relative would have wanted. I agreed to go back to the Wellbeing Centre and asked for the BasicsCard. The BasicsCard made an immediate difference because food became my main expense not grog. The grandchildren quickly saw the results and hugged and kissed me because I was with them now, not away in alcohol dreams.

I kept talking about my sorrow to the Wellbeing Centre lady counsellor and the days started to brighten. We set up a meeting with the Child Safety Service officers and explained what had happened and how I was getting better. To my surprise they were very understanding and offered to help with some respite care over the school holidays. One of my grandchildren is going to boarding school next year, and they are helping both me and my granddaughter prepare for that.

We are not happy ever after, but most of the time we are pretty good. The grandchildren go to school every day, I keep the home clean, and I help out at the school when they need. I don't drink much anymore and prefer to go out to country on the weekends fishing, swimming and telling stories with my children and grandchildren. I still get sad, but it passes when I think of the hugs and kisses from my grandchildren and the future they will have.