

On The Home Stretch

Words: Jodie Senbruns and Leanne Wood Photo: Contributed

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It's a classic movie road trip scene – the young couple in a car, side by side. She's musing on life as the scenery blurs past the windows, and there's music playing on the radio.

'I did it,' she says. 'I made it to the other side.'

Except it's not a movie and there's a back story to this moment that makes it deeply significant. The young woman in the scene is Chantell-Marie Inglis and realising that she'd made a satisfying life for herself, despite the hardship of her childhood, was a pivotal moment.

At 23, Chantell-Marie is a young woman who knows where she's going. She's found what she loves – going to the beach, camping, exploring nature and appreciating all the natural wonders of life.

Above all; however, she's living her dream of becoming a youth worker with IFYS on the Sunshine Coast, inspiring

kids in care to push through the hard times and their self-doubt.

'I can't explain what it feels like to be experiencing this,' says Chantell-Marie.

'I think my heart is glowing.'

'It's the happiest I have ever felt, knowing that I am working towards my dream career.'

Prior to the last couple of years, Chantell-Marie didn't have much to be happy about. As a child in the Queensland care system, she had 15 foster care and residential placements between the ages of 12 and 15. The constant instability left her feeling abandoned and as if she wasn't "good enough."

At 15, she moved into an independent living arrangement, with a youth worker who dropped in a couple of times a week.

'I wanted to prove to everyone I could do it all on my own, so I worked three casual jobs while I was at school,' says Chantell-Marie.

'But I was tired all the time from working and ended up excluded from school because I missed so much time.'

Without some routine to anchor her days, Chantell-Marie found herself adrift.

The next few years were lost and lonely ones. She got in with the wrong crowd and lost her casual jobs. She moved from one location to another, vainly seeking a fresh start; lived through a relationship that didn't work out, and survived addiction, illness and anorexia.

'It was overwhelming,' she says.

'The closer I got to 18 the more confronting it was. My only "safe place" and support was the contact I had with the Department of Child Safety, and I knew that relationship would end on my 18th birthday.

'There was no way I could deal with everything the adult world was demanding I do – budgeting, court, bills, car, taxes. I just had no idea and no one to ask.'

At 19, with her life spiralling out of control, Chantell-Marie finally found a hand up through the Integrated Family and Youth Service (IFYS).

'My whole world changed,' she says.

'I still had so much growing up to do at that age. IFYS didn't just help me with fundamental things like finding a



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Chantell-Marie Inglis

real home, they helped me find the stability and confidence to take control of my life.

'I didn't feel like a victim anymore.'

Chantell-Marie has taken to heart the message of the "Home Stretch" campaign in Queensland, a campaign that advocates for all young people in care to have the option for extended care and support until the age of 21, rather than being forced to exit at 18.

Currently, most young Queenslanders have the option of moving in and out of home until their mid-twenties, testing their wings, sometimes returning to a safe base and other times taking flight.

Home Stretch argues that young people transitioning to adulthood from state care deserve the same opportunity.

While there are some excellent programs and support services available, not all young people leaving care have the same capacity as Chantell-Marie to seek out and organise the help they need.

Even adults with a stable home and life experience can find juggling appointment planning, transport and the requisites of multiple health or other providers challenging — much less managing these requirements as a homeless teenager.

There's extensive evidence, both in Australia and overseas, that many care leavers simply don't manage. They are heavily over-represented in homelessness, justice and unemployment statistics; have poorer educational outcomes; and are more likely to face physical and mental health issues due to past trauma.

Chantell-Marie is fully aware that she could have been included in these grim figures.

Now, four years later, Chantell-Marie says, 'I'm not the same person I was at 19.'

'The woman I've become is thanks to having support and stability at a time when I was learning to deal with the whole adult world.'

'So many kids don't have the security of a home or the ongoing support they need when they transition out of care.'

Implementing Home Stretch, as the Victorian Government has recently done, would give these young Queenslanders more than a list of contact numbers to call for help.

It would give them hope for a bright future and a chance to give back to the community, as Chantell-Marie is now proud to be able to do.

Read more about The Home Stretch campaign and become involved at thehomestretch.org.au

What's in a name?



Glass House Mountains

Named the Glass Houses by Lieutenant James Cook on Thursday 17 May 1770, because they reminded him of the glass making furnaces in his native Yorkshire. A nearby creek was named Glass Mountain Creek, its Aboriginal name was daki common, meaning stone standing up.

Mons

Named after the Battle of Mons — the first major battle of World War I, that took place on the Western Front between the British and German armies on 23 August 1914. Tragically, Mons is where the first Australian, Lieutenant William Malcolm Chisholm, who was a first officer of the British East Lancashire Regiment, was killed in battle on 26 August 1914.

A ballot was organised for locals to place names in a hat to be drawn out to name the railway siding along the Buderim-Palmwoods Tramway. The tramway commenced operations in 1915. It is thought that the Dahl family placed the name Mons in the ballot to commemorate a son who may have fought at Mons.