

REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES

my story...



a collection of stories from the people of our community

Real People, Real Stories is a collection of stories from people in our community that celebrates their inspiring life changes.

The Family Centre thanks all those who contributed to this collection of stories, and who participated in our services over the past 25 years.

inspiring change since 1988

MY STORY *ngaire*

In April 2008 I had a new baby and a 2 ½ year old daughter. I was struggling to get both of them to settle and I was worried about my toddlers behaviour. I completed the Triple P Parenting course and I still use the skills and techniques I learnt in the course to this day.

Then in October 2008, my husband was diagnosed with a rare cancer. Our world was turned upside down. In desperation, as our then 6 year old daughter wasn't sleeping, I contacted The Family Centre about counselling for the whole family. Our family worker Julie was amazing. She helped us to organise in home daycare to let my husband and myself have time to attend treatment and discuss options, as well as provide a constant other adult in my children's lives.

Julie also liaised with Palliative Care at the hospital and did a lot of calling and asking for assistance for us, from places I had not even thought of – she was so helpful and understanding.

My husband has since passed away, we have been travelling okay, but to know The Family Centre is there at any time should we need it, (my kids are now 5 and 8), is a huge fallback position. Thank you to The Family Centre for supporting my family through some very difficult times.

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MY STORY *Sarah*

I moved to Murwillumbah in October 2011, I had no family in the area and didn't know anyone, but I was keen to get out and about with my son who was then 19 months old. I had already researched playgroups in the area – the first week I was in town I decided to go to The Family Centre playgroup. Brenda was very warm and friendly, she helped me feel welcome.

I had moved to Murwillumbah to be with my now ex husband whom I had not seen for 6 months. I was given the shock of my life, suddenly my marriage was on the rocks and I had no idea why, how or when.

My weekly trip to playgroup was the rock that held me up, and helped me cope and keep going. The support and very good advice I received from Brenda and other Family Centre staff was amazing.

My son is now 3 ½ years old and this is our final few months of play group before he goes to preschool next year. I will miss going to playgroup, but I will always remember the fun times, support and wonderful help I received. The Family Centre have so much more to offer than just playgroup – so they won't have seen the last of me.

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MY STORY *angela*

I am a mother of 2 1/2 year old twin girls and first became connected with The Family Centre around a year ago. I was struggling with becoming a new mother, my general mental and physical well-being was suffering, the girls weren't sleeping and their behaviour was hard for me to manage at times.

The Family Centre offered me great support with home visits and courses. I have attended a few parenting courses and many self help courses, all of which have been extremely beneficial. The family worker also encouraged me to see my doctor and seek counselling, all of which I have done and as a result my family life has improved in so many ways.

The Family Centre have been the biggest pillar of support to me, especially over the past three months and I thank the powers that be for sending them my way. I truly do not know where I would be if they were not around, but I know it would not be a good place.

So I thank all the amazing men and women at The Family Centre – thank you for being there for my family.

my family life has improved in so many ways



MY STORY *igor*

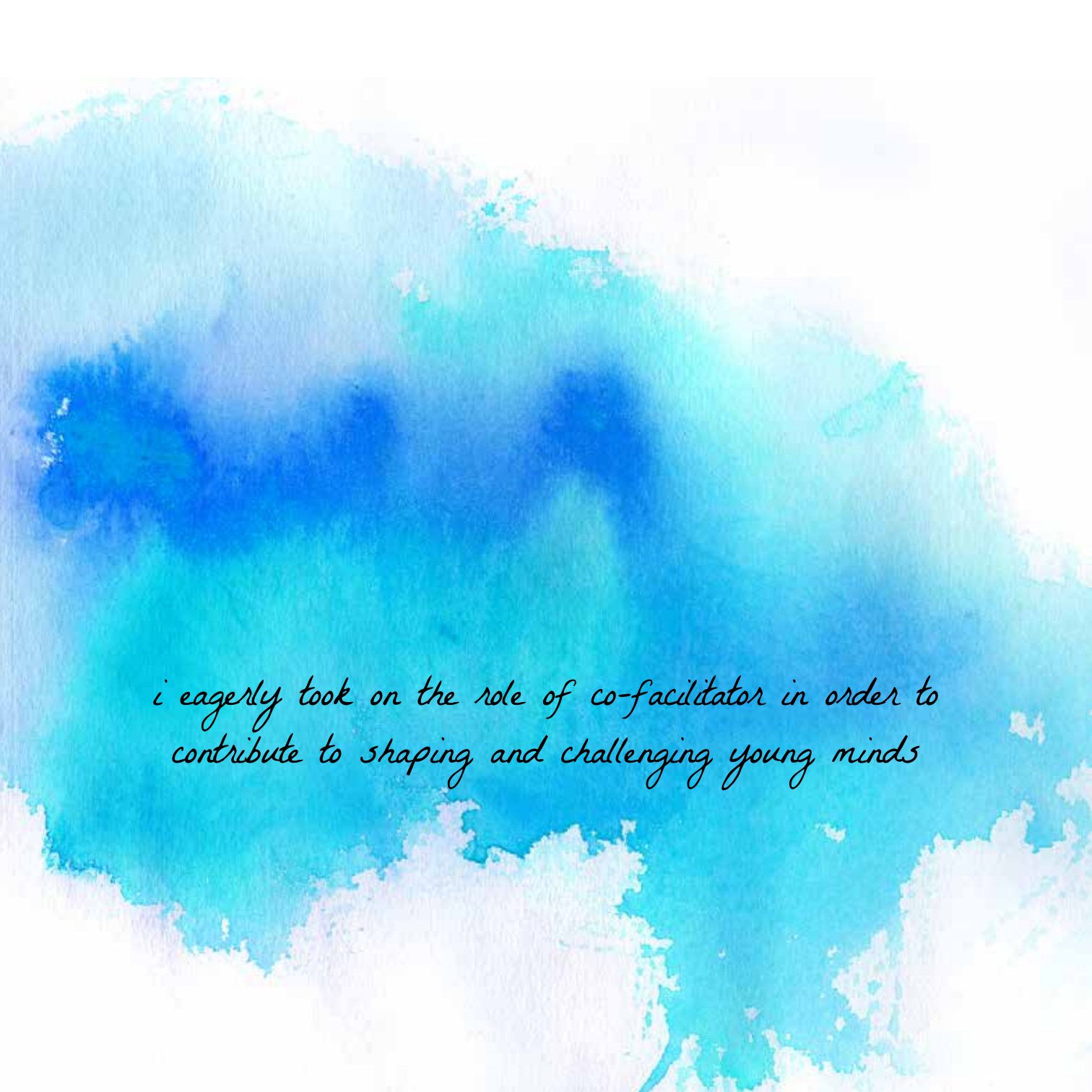
As a therapist and counsellor working with adults, I have for a long time believed that real life skills need to be introduced into the education system. Upon finding the REALskills program at The Family Centre, I discovered a suite of programs aimed at all year levels, providing the education necessary to equip children and young adults with the knowledge and techniques to better navigate life.

Inspired and excited by the program, I eagerly took on the role of co-facilitator in order to contribute to shaping and challenging young minds. What I did not expect, and what surprised me most about this work was how it would shape and challenge me.

Working with adolescents would trigger in me my feelings and thoughts of that age, buried deep within myself, illuminating that which I had unresolved from the dynamics I had experienced as a school boy. Layers of insecurity, peer group dynamics and other adjustments I had made in my past would bubble up to the surface, demanding to be looked at. This allowed me (and forced me) to become aware of the mature adolescent parts of me long forgotten in the basement of my mind. With each class interaction, I noticed myself growing in ways that I did not know I could, expectedly in my skill set and unexpectedly as a person.

As my relationship with my inner world healed, I noticed how my ability to connect, relate to and support the students deepened. I also found that I felt more confident and at ease with my impending fatherhood.

The Family Centre's REALskills program fills a necessary void, left by our missing ancestral culture's Rites of Passages: those processes, techniques, rituals and appropriate dialogue that guide the necessary transitions on the way to adulthood. It is much easier to influence a developing mind by planting and encouraging the growth of healthy seeds, rather than attempting to weed a garden once it has overgrown. This program, in my opinion, serves a vital purpose in the development of healthier and happier minds.



*i eagerly took on the role of co-facilitator in order to
contribute to shaping and challenging young minds*

MY STORY *eve*

I was first introduced to The Family Centre a couple of years ago when I moved to the area and was looking for a Playgroup for my daughter, then aged around 18 months. I had just become pregnant with my second child and was really struggling with horrible morning sickness. I had very few contacts in the area apart from my husband's family. I felt quite isolated having moved from Sydney and Brisbane where I had a good circle of friends.

I joined the playgroup at Banora Point – Brenda from The Family Centre was warm and friendly, she welcomed me into the playgroup and introduced me to everyone. It was reaffirming to be surrounded by other mum's facing similar challenges with their children. Brenda seemed to have an uncanny knack of bringing out the perfect information sheets for us just when we would hit a new parenting dilemma and my daughter loved the art and craft!

Other workers from The Family Centre came along to offer their support and link us in to more activities. I ended up booking myself in to do the 123 Magic parenting course which gave some great basic tools to use!

I became so inspired by The Family Centre I decided I really wanted to work there and leapt on the opportunity of becoming a REALSkills Sessional Facilitator which worked well with my gradual return to work.

Now that my children are almost 2 and 4 I am really grateful to have had quality support from The Family Centre to guide me through some challenging parenting experiences.

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MY STORY *maya*

I'm a 13 year old girl who's life was changed by The Family Centre.

My school started a program supported by The Family Centre where a group of girls were chosen by my Year Advisor and got assigned to two youth workers, which were Kate from The Family Centre and A'isha from Nortec Youth Connections.

The first time I had girls group I was nervous but excited too, I felt more comfortable when we started the group with how we were all feeling and that's how we started the group every Tuesday morning.

We did artwork and inspirational tasks that helped if we were feeling down.

Kate and A'isha always told us girls that we are princesses in training which made us feel special because in this world of social media where girls need to be popular, to be a princess means how many likes we get on photos on Facebook, we have now learnt that you don't have to be popular to be special.

We established rules in the group when girls group started and one of them was trust, where if one of us said something that is very personal we must keep it a secret.


Girls group taught us different ways of how to deal with a hormonal teenage girl life and essence qualities that can make us better people in this world.

The one core thing we learnt was how to love ourselves which I think is important when girls are in High School. The last time we had girls group we were awarded with certificates and a candle which we can light up when we need guidance but the one thing that we gained after girls group was a sisterhood of girls who understand each other and will be by each other's side through rain and sunshine in High School.

All of our sisterhood misses girls group now but we feel that girls group has helped us discover more ways to bring ourselves back up again when in doubt and darkness.

Thank you to all the Family Centre and especially Kate and A'isha who have made princesses in training believe.

*girls group has helped us discover more ways
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MY STORY

joanne

As my two daughters are approaching teenage years, one 13 and the other 15, I felt that I needed to understand their world better.

We have all been teenagers and feel that we can guide our kids from our own life experiences but it is a different world today, with social media, technology, more pressures, different drugs - our children are so easy to lose now. Thankfully my 13 year old daughter had access to a special service from The Family Centre called Girls Group.

The Family Centre runs 3 different workshops for teenagers in High Schools, covering today's issues that are vital for our youth to be aware of.

For my daughters, these workshops have given them a better understanding of topics such as bullying, relationships, drugs, alcohol and sexual assault.

With this information they now possess knowledge and understanding of what is the best way to deal with any situation in their teen lives. They have also been given contacts and advice for anything that is a danger to them.


I too have attended the Understanding Teenagers Workshop and have learnt so much more about ways to deal with the challenges of living with teenagers.

I gained interesting facts and better ways to help and guide my daughters through today's difficult environment. I now feel that I can raise my daughters and allow them the freedom to grow, knowing that they will make the right choices with the support I give them.

My 13 year old has also contributed by making a special emotion gauge that sits on our fridge for us all to use, so we can live in harmony.

I thank The Family Centre from my heart, for their services. They have made our family a stronger clan and have helped me by giving me tools, patience and a greater understanding of my daughters lives.

Congratulations on 25 years of service to the community. I look forward to doing more workshops with The Family Centre in future.



I would like to make a special mention of how wonderful and supportive Kate has been to me. She has been a pillar of strength through trying times with my teenage daughter and I just want to take this opportunity to show my gratitude for having Kate in our life.

She is an inspirational adult for my daughter and a guiding light for me and words cannot express how much she has done for our mother/daughter relationship... and I want to thank her, from my heart for all of her compassion, enthusiasm and endless support she has given us.

love and light to you kate

MY STORY *Sheena*

When I first moved up from Victoria to Cabarita Beach, NSW, almost 4 years ago, I had a 2 year old daughter and was 7½ months pregnant and I didn't know anyone. My husband was busy trying to set up a business and was rarely home. I came across a playgroup run by The Family Centre. I went along once, but felt a bit overwhelmed, although the playgroup was small and my daughter seemed to like it, the other parents all knew each other and I found it hard. I didn't return to playgroup until my new baby was 6 months old. I was finding it hard at home, no friends or family around. Plus my house was across the road and my eldest would stand at the window every Tuesday and watch mothers, with the kids walking past to go to playgroup. I told her "ok, we will go next week."

That weekend we did a day trip to Byron for my husband to look at surf boards. Whilst we were in the store we chatted to the sales person, a lovely guy, who spoke of his wife and how we would get along really well. We also discovered we both lived in the same town, and on opposite sides of the street from each other. He mentioned his wife went to the Cabarita playgroup and they had just moved here from Sydney.

On the Tuesday morning we got ready to go, my eldest was super excited. As I walked in a lady with a huge smile says, "Hi there, are you Sheena?" it was the guy's wife from the surfboard store. Three years later we are great friends, we still catch up, coffee, play dates, general chats on the phone and best ever – girls nights out. If playgroup is not on due to holidays or wet weather, a group of 5–6 ladies and their kids get together at one of our houses, or go for coffee. It's so relaxed and the kids get along so great. We are all from different areas of Australia, and understand each other's situation. My children consider the entire playgroup kids their best friends; we attend all their birthday parties, and have regular play dates. Without playgroup my move away from my friends and family back home would have been a lonely one. I am now a bridesmaid to my best friend who I met through playgroup. I have a great support system in these ladies who I will call my friends for a long time to come.

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MY STORY *judith*

I am a mother of 6 children – the eldest being 31 years old and the youngest 9 years old. Only my youngest 4 boys live at home (aged 15 to 9 years).

I first heard about The Family Centre 3 years ago through an ad in my children's school newsletter for the Triple P course in Murwillumbah. The course covered invaluable parenting techniques that I still use and practice today with my children. One of the most valuable things I learnt was that no matter how busy you are - pause, take a moment, listen to your child and give them your full attention – that quality time, whether it be a minute or two is invaluable to your child – and you. They know you are listening and feel heard and validated. Some of the techniques in the course were just common sense but when we are busy we tend to just do what works at the time. I was always calling out instructions through the house to the boys with very little response to action, but I have learnt that going to the boys and getting their attention I get a much better result.

I also learnt about self-care – I knew about self-care but never put it into practice and always put everyone else's needs ahead of mine.

One of the best parts of the course was a one on one with a family worker. I met with Jess she was just fantastic. She was helpful in reassuring me as a parent that I was doing things right – this was very empowering to me as a mother.

The success of Triple P set the wheels in motion for me. I decided to enrol in Soon they will be Teenagers. With a couple of emerging Teenagers in the house I was reassured that some of the behaviour was just normal part of becoming a teenager and what other behaviours I could expect. I also learnt not to

set my expectations of my pre-teens behaviour too high as I could be expecting the impossible! I found the segment on brain development in teens very interesting and insightful. I later enrolled in The Family Centres course Understanding Teenagers it seemed to be a natural progression to learning more about the growing needs of my family and our relationships.

I had gained confidence with my parenting skills but I realised I needed to work on myself. I enrolled in Say what you mean, mean what you say with Dot. With Dot I learnt how to have meaningful relationships with my whole family – children and husband. I also learnt how to be assertive so that I was heard and my needs were fulfilled.

Along with this course and other service providers in the community this was the start of me finding my inner confidence with not only my family relationships but with personal challenges and professional goals.

I recently completed a second course with Dot – Self Esteem. This was truly life changing experience and I was in a place where I was ready for change – I realised I was ready to fly.

Dot was instrumental in empowering me to do things out of my comfort zone, building my confidence and being aware of my potential. So much so that I am now enrolled in formal study to become a Relationships Coach as well as extra training in Facilitation run by The Family Centre. I have also recently become member of The Family Centre.

I am looking forward to my future studies in Relationship Coaching, and I'm excited about what the future holds. A big thank you to The Family Centre for giving me the tools to inspire my change.

i realised i was ready to fly

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OUR STORY *jo & maddy*

My name is Jo and I have 3 great children. My two older children I don't see much as one is at University and the other has left home to work. I live with my youngest child Madison (Maddy) she is 8 years olds.

My life has had a lot of ups and downs – but I pray that I will have a brighter future and think positive thoughts every day.

I was living in shared accommodation when I became pregnant with my youngest child Maddy. The accommodation was unsafe and I was reluctant to stay because of danger to my unborn child – the property owners didn't care as long as the rent was up to date so I decided to leave. I went to Government Agencies to see if they could help me, but they could only do so much. I was given two nights in a motel in South Tweed. Once the two nights where up, a great single father of two daughters, gave me his lounge room floor to sleep on for a week.

After the week had passed I found no one could help me – I rang the Salvation Army in Queensland (Still Waters Women's Refuge) and they said they had no beds and they would ring me when a shared single bed was available.

I ended up on the streets of Coolangatta. I was very frightened and scared. The street elders warned the other people living on the streets to keep away from me as there would be consequences for them as I was pregnant and vulnerable.

A week and a bit passed and the Refuge rang to say they had an available room. I stayed at the Refuge until I had Maddy. I told the Refuge staff I wanted to settle back into the Tweed area so after 9 months at the Refuge I found a small place and Maddy and I returned to the Tweed.

Being through so much during the pregnancy and with no support or help with a newborn baby I became overwhelmed. I cried when Maddy was asleep – I was anxious, frustrated and depressed. I made an appointment with a Doctor at Tweed, he tried giving me tablets to mask my worries. I said 'I really need help I have no family except my older children'. He said 'You will be fine, just take the pills'. Then I screamed as loud as I could 'I NEED HELP DOCTOR'. He sent me to Tweed Hospital Emergency to get help.

I walked to the hospital and meet with a social worker who gave me information brochures on organisations that could help me on the Tweed. One brochure stood out, it was The Family Centre – the name was comforting to me.

I rang The Family Centre and immediately broke down to the receptionist Diane – she comforted and reassured me everything would be alright and she would do anything in her power to help me and Maddy.

A few days later I got a phone call from Yvonne a family worker. She asked all the right questions and said she would be coming to visit me and Maddy the next day. I was so excited and relieved that someone did care.

The next day there was a knock, knock on the door... 'Hi it's Yvonne'. Those words tingled in my veins with eagerness and anticipation, but I was also tearful from stress.

Yvonne walked in and gave me a big hug and said 'The Family Centre is here'. Bursting into tears in a heap in her arms I said 'Thank you'.

From that day on Yvonne organised a lady called Donna to come and see Maddy and I every week to take us for coffee, walks or just give me a break.

*my life has had a lot of ups and downs - but I
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positive thoughts every day*

Yvonne always popped in on special occasions, Easter and Christmas bringing me beautiful clothes and special things for Maddy and I.

Yvonne had seen my confidence grow and that I was feeling more positive and helping myself (although I was still very weary of people), she suggested I join some group classes at The Family Centre. There were a range of courses to choose that included self esteem, parenting and effective communication. I enrolled in Self Esteem for Women with Dot. When I went to The Family Centre for the course I meet Diane the lovely receptionist who had been so comforting the first day I rang – she was just as lovely in person. To this day I still keep in touch or do lunch with the girls from the group.

I also did a number of positive parenting classes and more which I have Certificates to say I passed or attended.

I love that The Family Centre provides these courses plus child care while you do courses, coffee and food.

The Family Centre has also provided me counselling, self-help tapes and budgeting advice. Every time I have seen a worker from The Family Centre they have always reassured me that everything will be ok.

I am still working with The Family Centre and eight years on I got a wonderful family worker – Julie. She has supported me in so many ways. She has assisted me and my daughter with transport to appointments at school, Government Agencies and shopping centres. Julie also visits us each week to see how we are both going. It's comforting to know we have her support.

All I can say is thank God for The Family Centre. I may not have blood relatives left except my children but I will thank and love The Family Centre and it's amazing people as my true family until the day I die.

Thank you so much – Love and hugs Jo and Maddy

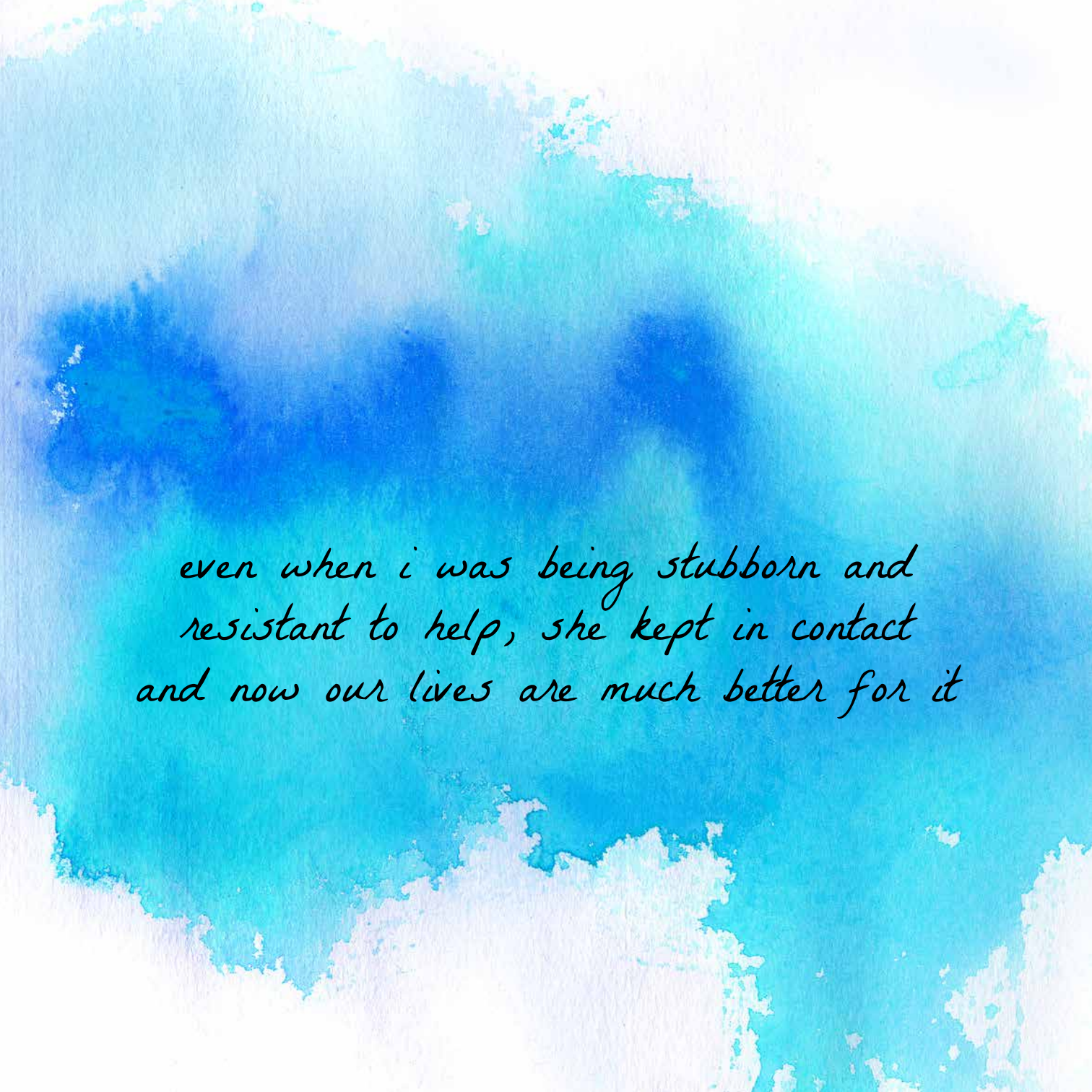


i do have a family



OUR STORY *sarah & tom*

My first introduction to The Family Centre was when I was very, very flat. I initially talked to a most wonderful woman who was so understanding I felt inflated when I left. My little family was assigned a worker and my rather difficult son took to her straight away. She was great. Even when I was being stubborn and resistant to help, she kept in contact and now our lives are much better for it. We were even encouraged to roll down hills and sumo wrestle by attending the SuperHero Saturday! Such fun! It's hard seeking help. I felt shame and embarrassment, but it has all been worth it in the long run.



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MY STORY *slavko*

On the day that I attended the Mindful Art of Stress Reduction, my blood pressure was very high (I am being treated for high blood pressure). I was very much surprised when I measured it during the course – actually it was after the meditation session – to find that it was normal – this not having happened for a very long period of time. From that day I am doing some of the exercises that were shown to us at the course.

I thank the staff at The Family Centre, especially Deb, and the facilitators of the course, Jack and Ken, who showed all of us how to improve our wellbeing. Remember, if you ever get into a problem the only person who can help you is yourself.

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MY STORY *Samantha*

I am a mum to a 5½ year old and 13 month old. The last 7 weeks have been extremely difficult for our little family with illness, dairy intolerances, reactions to immunisations which resulted in severe sleep issues in our 13 month old.

We are new to the area and have no immediate family locally. I was at the end of my tether and didnt know what else to try or who to call. A friend from my mothers group put me into contact with The Family Centre.

From my first phone call with one of the admin team I knew I was in good hands. I have since had a home visit from Jess and it was lovely to have an objective ear to hear me and be a sounding board. I was able to chat without reservation and felt comfortable that I wasn't going to be judged, but would be given sound advice and reassurance.

It is nice to hear other people's tried and tested methods but also know you are doing the best you possibly can. Hubby always tells me I am doing a great job, but he has to say that. So it was nice for an outsider to say it.

I am looking forward to the Christmas get together and meeting other mums at playgroup in 2014.

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MY STORY *tania*

Who knew that such a wonderful service such as Parent Space existed? Certainly not me!

If you can imagine, a beautiful arch angel coming and visiting you once a month, embracing you with beautiful, majestic and gentle feathery white wings. To experience that unspoken sigh of relief when you can speak to someone who truly understands the trials and tribulations of being blessed by a gorgeous loving totally dependent little soul... A cherub to which, has unruly awaken you to the truths of lack of sleep, uncertainty as a person and there's no such thing as a code abiding parenting manual book. To have these angels provide a stable platform of support, educational guidance in your young child's developmental milestones and practical parenting suggestions when facing a delusional, self-confessed crazed mumzilla, has rescued me from the depths of insanity.

To their credit, not only has bubs benefited but I have grown not only as a good parent but also as a good person and citizen. The joyful times of connection, the joyful times of play and the enjoyed times of educational experience and behaviour, has allowed me to bond with the child in ways beyond which I thought impossible. It feels so good to know that now I not only have footprints in sand beside me but I am now capable of creating a lifetime of important imprints on the heart, life and development of a very important child.

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when you can speak to someone who truly
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MY STORY *kath*

I am a mother of 2 sons and 5 grandchildren – moved to Tweed Heads from Victoria in 2008.

I joined The Family Centre in May 2008 as a volunteer for the home visit service. I enjoyed meeting the mums, their children and new babies (some of the families had twins which was twice the fun).

I enjoyed talking to the mum's and listening to their concerns and giving them advise if they asked. I was sorry when the home visit service finished – I really missed keeping in touch with the families.

I still do volunteer work for The Family Centre – Superhero Saturday, Bunnings sausage sizzles and gift wrapping for Christmas are just a few things I do.

I enjoy the company of the other volunteers and staff, who are always very friendly. I also love attending social occasions and lunches with The Family Centre.

I would like to congratulate The Family Centre on 25 years and wish them well for the future.

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real people, real stories...





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happy children **caring** relationships **strong** community