

# Intergenerational Homelessness in Melton: A 23-year-old Mother of Three Shares Her Story

Hope Street Youth and Family Services

Sian (name changed) is a mother of three from the Melton area who has overcome adversity and created a positive new future for herself and her young family with the support of Hope Street Youth and Family Services.

Ever wondered what it would be like to have three children in your care and nowhere to call home? It's an upsetting thought for any parent, yet for a number of young families in the Melton region it's a reality that, for various reasons, they have to face.

Twenty-three-year-old mother of three, Sian is no stranger to the realities of homelessness. While growing up in Melbourne, she spent years moving around, changing schools and in the care of the Department of Health and Human Services due to her mother's long-term drug addiction, and the many issues that came with that.

'We [Sian, her mum and her two younger siblings] were homeless from when I was aged seven to 13,' Sian explains. 'We lived in refuges

and hotels. I'd watch my mum line up in the street at the Salvation Army from six o'clock in the morning hoping to get a bed to sleep in that night.'

Sian says that her family life lacked the basic stability and emotional support that is so essential for young children. 'I was more of her shoulder to cry on than her daughter,' Sian says of her mother, who she says would often take off for weeks at a time and leave her with three young siblings to take care of. 'At the age of 13 I wasn't doing what normal kids are doing, I was raising my brothers and sisters.'

When Sian was 16 years old, her mother left Sian and her siblings and didn't return, 'She said she was going to Centrelink and never came back.' Not long after, Sian found herself pregnant, aged 17. 'I was badly depressed when mum left and was seeing a counsellor,' she explains. 'I was physically ill and throwing up every day, then I discovered I was pregnant.'

In the end, the pregnancy was a turning point for Sian. 'It was the best thing that ever happened to me,' she says. 'It changed my life completely. Within two months of knowing I was pregnant, my depression completely went away.'

Sian said that having her own unborn child to focus on allowed her to let go of the disappointment over her fractured relationship with her mum. 'I decided that I was no longer going to cry over a woman that didn't love me as much as I loved my unborn child. I would never up and leave my children; I could never contemplate being the mother she was. Becoming



Street art



*a mother made me realise that I wasn't going to make excuses for my mum any longer.'*

Sian says that her mother eventually ended up in prison for drug-related charges, and was still there when she died of kidney failure in late 2018.

It's clear to see that the instability of her upbringing has given Sian a strong resolve to do the best she can for herself and her children. Although she missed out on many of the basic privileges afforded to kids growing up in Australia — a stable home, supportive parents — she does not see herself as a victim, nor does she think it should shape her future, or her children's' possibilities. Thanks to her connection with Hope Street, Sian is confident that she's now on her way to creating a life that will enable her children to thrive in their own lives.

After initially being taken in by her partner's parents, then living in transitional housing, Sian had no rental history to support her in her attempts to rent her own place. She was facing

the threat of homelessness again early last year, while pregnant with her third child, and was referred to the Hope Street First Response Youth Mobile Outreach Service by a Melton City Council housing worker. There, she received support from a Hope Street outreach worker who helped Sian with transport to attend rental inspections, and who was able to help her find a place of her own — a three-bedroom house, located five minutes away from her daughter's school.

Hope Street was by Sian's side to help her set up her new home with basic furniture and a pantry full of food, and has continued to provide support any time she has needed it. When Sian gave birth to her now five-month-old son in 2018, she had complications that required a lengthy hospital stay. She had trouble getting to the bank to pay her rent but says Hope Street helped her to pay the rent and come up with a payment plan for moving forward.

*'There are a lot of young people out there who don't have parents who*

*teach them life skills,' Sian says. 'I never knew how to look for my own house to rent; my mum only ever showed me how to go to SASHS [Salvation Army Social Housing and Support]. That's what Hope Street gave me. They taught me how to be a good tenant, to know my rights as a tenant, how to do everything and not to be so worried about everything.'*

While for now she is focused on caring for her youngest baby, Sian has bright hopes for the future. Having already completed the first year of her apprenticeship as a chef, she is keen to return to cooking once her youngest is in kindergarten. And her biggest dream? To transition to a new career that gives her more time with her kids: baking birthday cakes.

*'At the end of the day, my kids are my end goal. Anything they need comes first. As a kid, they didn't ask to be born, you chose to have them so you have to raise them in the right way. They're counting on you to become good little humans.'*