



**Recorded story of DM – a child in care**

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me when you were taken into care?

**DM:** I was 5 years old and we were at school. My big brother, my big sister and my little sister and we were waiting for my mum and dad to pick us up from school but they were running late. And that is when we seen two white people were walking in. And one turned into the Principal and one kept on walking up to the Principal's office where we were to come and pick us up and they took us to one carer.

Well they took us to this one carer and they told us we were staying there for the weekend and that we'll be going back to our parents after the weekend. When the weekend was finished they came and picked us up and took us to the airport. They sent us to our community from where we were from. We were living with our two nanas and it just wasn't nice.

**Interviewer:** Why is that?

**DM:** They weren't looking after us. And like one of my nanas every time she would come into Darwin I would always try to beg to her to bring us with her but she wouldn't. She would leave \$5 for me to buy lunch for me and my little sister. And then she would take off to Darwin and leave us with her daughter. Her daughter was about, I can't really remember, but she was about 14 or 16. She would always leave us at home and always make me do her chores and that. Every time my parents would send stuff for us like bikes and pools and that they would always claim our bikes and they would always swim in our pools and told us we weren't allowed in there. I remember one time on my big brother's birthday my mum and dad sent us a lot of food, like party food and cake and stuff. And one of my nanas told my brother to run up to the other house and get batteries and when he came back all the food was already gone even though it was his birthday. It was just not nice there. Yeah, I didn't like it.

**Interviewer:** How long were you there for?

**DM:** We stayed there from when I was 5 until I was about 7 or 8.

**Interviewer:** Where did you go to next?

**DM:** Then we come back to Darwin. I had, like, I can't remember how many different placements but I had like about 20 different placements because I was just getting moved a lot and one time ... We were always getting moved to different hotels and that mainly. One time I had this one lady that I was staying with. She took me to the duck pond and I was about, I think I was about 7. And she was with this guy and we went out to have, like, something to eat and I had ice cream. And because I had the ice cream all over my shirt they told me to come back with them to the boat. And we went back to the boat and then they told me to have a shower and change into his clothes so we could go to the movies and I was really happy and wanted to go to the movies. And then like when I finished having a shower, I went to try and open the door they were in and they slammed the door on me basically. So I went and sat down outside and when they came out they said they were reading a book but when I look back I don't think they were reading a book I think they were doing something else that they shouldn't be doing. That was just horrible.

**Interviewer:** Did they take you to the movies?

**DM:** No. I put his clothes on for nothing. It was so disgusting.

**Interviewer:** What about the next carer?

**DM:** The next carer.

**Interviewer:** I think there were a couple before that? Do you remember about that one?

**DM:** This was when I was 8. I stayed with this one lady and I always smelt black smoke in the house. One time I went into the bathroom and in the cupboard I found a bong, a bowl and scissors. I confronted her about it and she said that it wasn't hers. She just didn't watch me and, like, she would let me roam around the streets and go to the next suburb and I would, like, hang out with my friends.

That's when I went to another carer. At first me and my big sister and my little sister were staying there and my big sister, she started running away first because she told me one time that when she was at a bus stop my carer and her oldest daughter pulled up and they double banked my big sister and they had her against the bus stop and they were just, like, hitting her and that. And then, yeah, there was one time when – one time when ...

**Interviewer:** Do you want to tell her about that time watching TV?

**DM:** Oh yeah, when we went to Sydney?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**DM:** We went for a holiday to Sydney with her and we were staying at her oldest daughter's place. And me, my little sister and two other young kids that stayed with us, we were running down the stairs and we were going out to have pizza. And then when we got down to the car park my carer was waiting down there. And she asked me, like, well she asked all of us who was screaming and that. And, like, we were all screaming running down the stairs. But when I got down to the bottom I was too scared to say that it was me so I just lied and said it was them. And then I had to watch them all get their ears twisted because she had, like, sharp, fake nails and they're like proper hard. And I watched them get all their ears twisted until they started bleeding. And then, um, yeah, I regret like, you know, watching that and lying. But, um, then there was another time when we was in Darwin and, um, I already spoke to FACS about this and like my uncle he was helping me out because I was telling him about all was happening and he called FACS and he was telling FACS too. And, yeah, so, um yeah like FACS spoke to me about it, about hitting us and that but um grabbed me because she said one time, like um, we were having an argument and she grabbed my arm where my scars are from when I got a cut from the dog and like she reopened one of my scars because she grabbed it and she scratched it. And then, um, after that argument, she like grabbed me and said – because I really wanted to go on this camping trip with my school - and, um, she grabbed me and said that if I, um, told FACS that everything's alright and nothing happened and that it was just a lie and then, um, that she'll pay for my camping trip so I did that and then, yeah, FACS didn't believe us any more about it. And then, um, yeah, like that's when, like, you know, I started getting a personality. Like I started changing, like wanting to dress up and that. And because like I was always watching her daughter, like, she'd always dress up and wear short shorts and that so I started, like, wearing short shorts. And one time I wanted, like I went to dinner and met them at.. and I had short shorts on. And she's like, "Aw, change your shorts, you're a disgrace" and stuff like that. And then, um, and then, yeah, so I just took off and I walked all the way from, like, all the way to where my big sister was. And then, like, I

started staying there and I was staying with one of our aunties - we respect her like an aunty because we've known her for years. And I was staying with her. She got me back into school and, like, you know, because when I was with I was, like, going to Cas and I was, like, stealing and I, like, started wagging school but didn't know about it.

Well, with my old carer, like, um, I was every day after school, if I wasn't wagging school, I'd be at Cas and I was, like, always stealing, like, clothes and that, just stealing anything. And, um, yeah but she didn't – my carer didn't know about that. And that's when I ran away after that night at dinner and then when I went to my big sister, she was staying with my aunty already so I just decided to start staying there with them. And then, yeah, so she got me back into school, I stopped stealing and, like, you know it was good there. And then FACS decided to rock up one day and I didn't want to go with them so – this is going to take forever.

**Interviewer:** That's OK. Just do what you can.

**DM:** I didn't want to go with FACS and then, so they called the police and then the police come, they found me and then they took me in the back of the paddy wagon to a house and then at that house they locked me in the house. And I think there was about five carers there. And all the doors were locked. And there was a carer coming through the door. And I quickly pushed past that carer and got out and I ran off and there was this one carer following me but, like, I took off from him and then I ran all the way to a bus stop in and I caught the bus.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember what else happened at that place?

**DM:** At that place?

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Did you have some other problems there with things that were happening?

**DM:** Oh yeah. I started doing like property damage there and that. And I was getting charged, like, at the age of, say, 11, 12 to 13. And, like, oh, I started sniffing glue and I did that for like, a year. And, so after I started sniffing glue, they set up this meeting for me in Berrimah. It was at the safe house. And, like, the meeting was just meant to be about me and, you know, like that stuff and they didn't tell me that, like, I was staying there. And then when I got there I seen that it was like bars and that and, like, I didn't want to stay there and I knew that if I went in there, there was no way of coming out and they were just like...Oh, well this one carer that I got along with really well, she was sitting down with me and she was telling me, "No, it's going to be alright. They're not going to lock you in. I'll be there with you the whole time, you know, we'll come out together." And then when I went in, you know, like sure enough, we had the meeting and the meeting was about me staying there. And then I was just like, no, I don't want to stay here, like, telling them to open the gate and that but they wouldn't open the gate.

And then, yeah, so I was locked in there and I had to, like, find ways to, like, escape, like, there was this one way I would climb on the bars and I would climb up to the roof and there was this little hole up the top and I would, like, squeeze my way through there.

And then there was this one time when me and this other girl, we were in her room, and I grabbed the keys off one of the workers because he was meant to give me a smoke that he owed me because, like, he always gave me smokes and he said that if you be good or something I'll give you a smoke later and I said yeah well we've been smokes and he said that if you be good or something I'll give you a smoke later and I said yeah well we've been good so are you going to give us that smoke? And then he didn't give me so then I pulled the keys from, like, where his pants were, they were

clipped onto where his belt is and then, yeah, I kept on pulling it, pulling it and then eventually he just unclipped it from his shorts. And I ran into the other girl's room and I threw the keys to her, had my back against one of the doors, like the door that he could get through. And she was unlocking the back door that we could escape from. And, like, she jumped over the gate and, like, legged it and I jumped over the gate, but the back of my leg were caught on it. And yeah, like, I pulled my leg down and I kept on running but then when we were hiding, I felt my leg and, like, there was just like, when I looked at my hand, there was just blood all over my hand so I had to go back there. And then the carer come and he found us and he took me – he took us back and I had to go to the hospital and then, yeah, I got locked back in there.

Yeah, and that's when I moved to and they were doing the same thing that they did at the safe house, locking me in there. And, like, it was just like a mental institution. Like, the rooms, every single room had a little window on it so the carers could come and they could unlock it with their keys and they can see what you're doing and like appraise you or something. And then they had a padded room and then, like, yeah, it was just horrible. And the gates outside had, like, rolling things so, like, if you tried to jump over it, you'd roll back in. And, like, the gates weren't normal. They were like little small metal things so you couldn't even climb it. And then, yeah, the front doors, they were glass doors and they would always have them locked so, like, once they open it with their swipe thing and you go it, it automatically locks and, um, yeah. So I couldn't get out of that place. And I was, like, always getting arrested, like, from – I was always getting arrested from even when I was in the safe house back in the last few placements, like, I was always getting arrested, like, for breaches of bails and that.

**Interviewer:** Was there a time when you had to go to hospital ?

**DM:** Yeah, but, um, yeah. So one time when I was in, like, I was able to escape and, like, when I finally ran away, I went on a three day drinking spree and I got real drunk and I went like alcohol poisoning and I collapsed at the back of shops. I was, like, legless. And then a security guard found me and he called the ambulance and that and then the police were called and then, like, I was taken to hospital and then, um, they they were putting drugs into my system, like, to try flush the alcohol out or something. And then, like, my body had a reaction and then my heart stopped three times and then, like, they had to come in with the big what-do-you-call-it? Do you know them things?

**Interviewer:** Cardiac something – I'm not sure - to start your heart again.

**DM:** Yeah, them big things and they like had to start my heart again three times and then I was in a coma. I don't know how long it was. I think I was there for, like, a week – no, not a week, maybe a few days. And then after them few days when I woke up and I was, like, finally stable, I tried to run away from the hospital. But then the security guards, like, followed me and took me back in. And when I went back in the police arrested me because I had breaches of bails from running away . And then when I got arrested, I went to Don Dale for a week, went back to court and then the Judge said, like, she wanted to, like, remand me so I can do my time. Because, you know, like I had some serious charges. And, like, I just stood up and I said no, can't I just get sent over to my community and live with my grandmother and then, you know, I can do my time over there and get like put on a good behaviour bond or something. And then, that's when DCF stood up and they tried saying, oh no, because her grandmother's sick. And that's when I said "No, my grandmother's not." Well they said she's got cancer and I said "No, well my grandmother's actually not sick, she got her cancer cut out." So the Judge turned around and said "Well, I don't see a problem with that. In one week's time – well, I'm going to remand her for another week and in one week's time I want her to be reunited with her grandmother in her community." And then, yeah,

I got remanded for another week and then my case manager picked me up from Donny's and she took me to the airport and I got sent straight over to live with my grandmother and it was good. Like, I stayed out of trouble for two whole years, I was going to school and, yeah.

**Interviewer:** You are still with FACS now?

**DM:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Where would you like to be?

**DM:** Back with my grandmother.

**Interviewer:** Where is she?

**DM:** She is in Darwin.

**Interviewer:** What are you doing for yourself now?

**DM:** I have got a job and I got my Ls on my own. FACS didn't help me. I did apply for a fitting course.

**Interviewer:** How did you get the job?

**DM:** Through my Centrelink providers.

**Interviewer:** So you did that on your own?

**DM:** Yes. This is my second job. My first job, I did that on my own. FACS didn't help me with that.

**Interviewer:** What would you like to change. Why are you telling this story? Why do you want to tell this story?

**DM:** Because I think it is not really fair what happened to me. I think kids that get taken away from their families shouldn't have to go through this. It should have been better for me. I hope it can change for other kids that are going through it at this moment.