

Out-of-home care working to support young people to overcome obstacles so they can make a difference in others' lives...

In 2024 the NSW out-of-home care sector experienced a raft of challenging public storytelling regarding what is perceived to not work to support children and young people in care. While it is clearly apparent that many aspects of out-of-home care in New South Wales need urgent reform and improvement, it is important to continue to recognize what does work, and the children and young people who are positively supported to thrive and live their best lives.

We think Travis's story does this.

Travis is 13 years old and has been in care since he was little. Travis identifies as Aboriginal and is invested in his culture and identity. He is an NDIS participant. He had a very challenging year in 2023, an important transitional year as he was leaving primary school. Disappointingly he was labelled the "troubled child" by the school community and sadly, not celebrated by his school for his NSW representative sporting achievements. In response Travis understandably disconnected from his education and his friends and acted out his feelings with some seriously challenging and violent behaviour. This put significant pressure on his carer and impacted safety and wellbeing at home for both Travis and his carer for a number of months.

Uniting NSW.ACT worked hard to support Travis when he started high school in 2024 in year 7. Travis was well supported by his high school community, including with a placement in an appropriate class and through a targeted specialist program at school. With this collective support, Travis has thrived. He was acknowledged for his sporting achievements (NSW representative squad 2024), was awarded most attended student, attending school for 98% of the year. Travis was observed by his teaching staff last year helping other students within his supported class unit and always showing an empathic, nurturing and caring side. With growing confidence at school, Travis re-engaged with his social network and his Mid North Coast community attending PCYC running club, PCYC basketball, and playing golf and tennis.

Travis also re-engaged with his family who he had refused to see for nearly a year and, at the end of 2024, had a family visit to Newcastle at the Variety Kids Christmas Party event at McDonald Jones Stadium. Uniting NSW.ACT and his carer arranged for his maternal family to attend all together as a surprise for Travis.

As a final, joyful end to 2024, Travis was inspired by this event to come up with his most recent idea of spreading Christmas joy to the residents at his local residential aged care facility.

He dressed himself in Christmas clothes, filled his stocking with candy canes and went from room to room with a ho, ho, ho and a Merry Christmas!!!



The response from residents was phenomenal as you can see from the comments below...

THANK YOU SO MUCH....I'M IN THE DUMPS TODAY....MY FAMILY ARE AWAY ON HOLIDAYS
AND NOT COMING TO SEE ME.

YOU'VE WARMED MY HEART.

WHAT A WONDERFUL BOY YOU ARE.

THIS IS REFRESHING...THANK YOU...I ONLY EVER HEAR OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE DOING BAD
THINGS ON THE NEWS!

Even the staff were tickled to receive Christmas wishes and a candy cane.

With resilient and collective support, children and young people in out-of-home care can - and do -
overcome serious obstacles in their lives. When they do, really great things happen!