

Feeling wanted, loved and accepted

Program: FFT-CW®



The Family Profile

After nine years in long-term foster care, Toby* was restored to mum, Tina and stepdad, Dean. During multiple placements in foster care, 14-year-old Toby experienced physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Toby is the oldest of three children and the other two remain in separate long-term foster care placements.

For the two years prior to restoration, Tina and Dean only had contact with Toby and the two younger children in the family once a month. This monthly contact has continued for Toby's younger siblings.

Toby had significant behavioural issues, particularly around physical violence. He was diagnosed and medicated for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). He also attended a specialised behaviour unit for his education after being suspended from his local school due to physical violence and assault. Tina and Dean did not feel equipped to handle Toby's escalating behaviour, and as greater conflicts arose, the family was referred to a FFT-CW® family therapist by their NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) caseworker.

When working with the family's FFT-CW® therapist, Toby was given the opportunity to talk and reflect about his experiences being in foster care. At the time, Toby was experiencing significant stress as felt he was too old for foster care, was seen as a 'problem child' and never felt accepted in his placements.

The therapist developed an open and trusting relationship with the family and tailored support to meet their needs. The therapist identified a behaviour pattern where Toby would escalate and Tina and Dean would escalate with him, creating greater conflict between them all.



The Result

Through the hard work of Toby, Tina, Dean and the therapist, the family have been able to manage their emotions and improve communication between each other. They have also improved their problem solving skills and the therapist worked with Toby's school to work towards the same goals.

Since practicing these strategies, conflict in the home has reduced and there have been no further incidents of violence at school. Toby is now making good choices and walking away from arguments and physical fights. Tina and Dean are currently making arrangements for Toby to attend the local high school as he no longer needs to attend a specialised behaviour unit due to his improved behaviour.

Toby is excited to be home with his mum and stepdad. He finally feels wanted, loved and accepted.

Since returning home, Toby has thrived. He is eating a healthier diet, has put on weight and is growing normally, made friends in his local neighborhood and is becoming more affectionate towards his mum and stepdad.

An important improvement for the family was learning how to express feelings and communicate, especially as they had not spent much time together over many years. Learning about how the brain functions during heightened emotional states helped the family identify when they were becoming 'triggered'. For example, when triggers arise. Dean now decides to take a walk, Tina will colour-in and Toby does exercise. The family have made remarkable progress and the parents enjoy the time spent with their therapist. The stepdad says their therapist "believes in us which makes us believe in ourselves" and the therapist "makes us see that we are kind of normal."