

Corey and Maree's story

July 22, 2010 was a special day for Maree Mitchell and her son Corey.

The day prior, Maree said she was barely able to sleep.

“Corey is moving in tomorrow morning and I can't wait. It's his home now, that's how I'm looking at it.”

Corey, aged 32, was one of the first of ten residents who will progressively move into Austin Street in Alphington, Victoria's first purpose-specific residence for young people who have an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) resulting in high and complex medical and physical support needs, currently living in aged care nursing homes.

Its launch on August 18 marks the beginning of a bright new chapter in the lives of its residents, and the result of three years' hard work by not-for-profit organisation Villa Maria, with the support of the Department of Human Services and the families and organisations determined to see this innovative and life-changing project become a reality.

Maree and Corey's journey to this point began a year prior to Villa Maria's successful tendering for government funding to build the facility under the *'my future my choice'* initiative in 2007.

Corey had been battling a drug addiction and experiencing depression before he attempted to take his own life in 2006. As a result, he now requires 24 hour-a-day care and cannot eat, walk or talk independently.

Maree said by sharing Corey's past, she hoped to spare other young people from a similar fate in the future. She also feels there is a huge need for more facilities such as Austin Street for young people with ABI or complex medical and physical care needs.

Until now, Corey has lived in a short term residential care facility.

His two children aged eight and 13 would not visit him there because it was “old and institutionalised”.

Maree said she hoped this would change with the move into Austin Street.

“I'm hoping the children will feel comfortable because it doesn't look forbidding or have a hospital feel. From the outside it just looks like a normal home.”

The opportunity to personalise Corey's room with his boxing paraphernalia and automotive posters had also made Austin Street feel comfortable and familiar, Maree said.

While Corey has short term memory loss, Maree said he was aware and happy of the move. “When I told him he was going to his new home he put his thumbs up,” she said.

Importantly, Corey will also have access to speech therapists and other health professionals which gives Maree hope for his future.

VILLA MARIA

Villa Maria's "caring and supportive" staff also give Maree, who lives in Queensland, peace of mind that Corey will be well looked after.

"Going by the surroundings; what Villa Maria has created, and the caring staff I've met, I feel he's in a place where he's wanted and is safe."

Villa Maria's Chief Executive Officer Ms Valerie Lyons agreed, stating "Austin Street will be a place where young people can live their lives to their full potential and be cared for in a holistic manner by family, friends and a strong professional network of people."

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