

Tomasi's Story

This story is to be read in conjunction with Launch Housing's teaching resource for high school students.



Like most 20-year-old university students, Tomasi worries about doing well in his studies and has great aspirations to help change the world. He has faced and continues to face many hurdles in his marathon to achieving his dreams. With a passionate yet shy mindset, Tomasi presents as a kind-hearted, unassuming and incredibly articulate teenager with an interest for community development and advocating for homelessness. What one may not notice on first glance, however, is that he was once one of the 28,000 young people who experience homelessness in Australia (ABS Census 2016).

Tomasi is a member of Launch Housing's Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG). This is Tomasi's story.



"My name is Tomasi, I'm a 19 year old Gooreng Gooreng, Fijian and Tongan man from south-east Queensland. I moved to Melbourne in late 2015. I am currently studying a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies, and have been a member of Launch Housing's LEAG since March 2018.

I can't remember how old I was the first time I ran away from home, but I must've been pretty young. It was definitely a common occurrence by the time I was 13.

At 14, I moved out of home into a youth hostel but I didn't last very long there, and I ended up couch surfing or on the streets. I became increasingly disengaged from school and my support networks. I never actually passed Year 10, which I find kind of funny.

I got in with the wrong crowds, and my poor mental health became worse and drug abuse became a pretty big problem.

At 16, I had dropped out of high school and was completing a chef's apprenticeship; at that time a friend's family had taken me in. That was one of my lowest points, when it came to my drug abuse and mental health. I had a stable job and house, and I lost them. I just wasn't well, and with my drug abuse I had little chance of keeping any semblance of normality in my life.

After a couple months of couch surfing, I decided to move to Melbourne to start again. I enrolled into a Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) TAFE program for the next year, and after spending Christmas in Queensland, I came back to Melbourne a day before classes started.

My brother and I had planned to have a place together, but that fell through, so I was couch surfing while trying to do my classes.

My first couple of months alone were relatively good with minor drug use, but it wasn't to last. An old friend came down from Queensland, and I fell in with a new crowd he knew here so I moved in with them. Living with them was the most stressful, and never-ending ten months of my life.

One time out with friends, I took a substance believing it was something else, and had a severe reaction. Within minutes of taking it I knew something was off, so I called my brother.

It wasn't the first time that had happened, and I probably would've continued putting myself in those kind of dangerous situations. But, my brother pulled me up and said he wouldn't stick around if I didn't pull my head in.

I'd been disengaged at VCE but in my final year I started to turn things around. I decided couch surfing and hostels were better than the house I was living in. And in the second semester I got a scholarship for student accommodation.

But then I started using a youth crisis service, and eventually they asked if I'd like to volunteer with them and I did. The service was really helpful, it gave me direction.

I'm now in my second year of university, I've volunteered or worked in homelessness for just over three years. I'm in a calm, stable share house and after graduating I hope to work in community development in the Pacific."