



Trust: Ashleigh Teraki has turned her life around with help from boss and mentor James D'ath. Picture: David Kelly

JAMES D'ATH, 44, REDCLIFFE

I guess you could call my childhood a very colourful existence. I was born and bred in Brisbane, but grew up in many places. I went to quite a few schools, only a few months at each.

Mum (Noella) got divorced when I was two and she was an alcoholic. We moved out west fairly early on. Mum wanted to get away from the city, but she didn't do it very cleverly. She bought a block of dirt on the floodplain at a place called Kogan. It was very, very bush. I was there from 1980 probably through to '85 – I call them my Wild West days.

My mother worked in bars and as a shearing cook and had some short-term relationships that all ended violently. She never had a loving, nurturing relationship with any man that I can remember growing up, and we just went from place to place as the relationships eroded.

I left home at about 15, hitchhiked to Brisbane and stayed on my brother's couch for a bit, tried to do the city thing, didn't work, ended up back at home for a month or two and then hitchhiked to Brisbane again. I did builders labourer jobs, worked at World Expo in '88 then I started a fencing business for a while. I think I've had 52 different occupations so far.

The couch-surfing was always with people I knew – and it's only now later in life that I realise there was an element of homelessness there.

I've always been resourceful. I had a teacher just before I left school – an incredible man – who let me hide at his house on weekends when things were horrible at home. He introduced me to philosophy and told me that a mind was not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled. And he did that with me, he kindled my mind and I never looked back, no matter what I did.

I've always had a fascination for food, always been a bit of a home cook, and I love the simplicity of burgers. They're a very tactile thing – you can eat them with your hands.

In October 2013, I opened DA'Burger (with

wife Wendy in New Farm) and in the planning phase, one of the first notes on my running ideas sheet says the brand would give back in some way. And I knew I wanted to do something with challenged or homeless youth.

I found the group at Brisbane Youth Service (BYS). Through 2014, we gave away suspended burger vouchers with BYS, so they could help kids come and eat for free. The uptake from customers buying those vouchers to feed someone who's homeless was phenomenal.

I met Ashleigh through BYS when she was a speaker at an event called Baggy Jumper Day where they raise money for homeless kids. She started at DA'Burger about eight months ago and it's going fantastically. She's now working for us full-time and we consider her part of the family.

Ashleigh and I have a very unique relationship where, one-on-one, we have very frank conversations. We are survivors ... we've seen some very horrible things in this world, and we are realists. There is nothing we can't talk about and when you have a connection like that, the shields come down, a level of trust is built.

From here, we've got to do more stores and help out more kids. When you can change one life ... that's priceless. That's life-changing.

Welcome home

From troubled upbringings and a mutual desire to give back, a strong friendship is forged

CAT LINDSAY

ASHLEIGH TERAKI, 26, SPRING HILL

My mum didn't have the best of upbringings, neither did my grandmother, so it was a cycle going from generation to generation. I was born in Bellwood, Christchurch, and grew up in New Zealand. We moved to the Gold Coast when I was 10 and it all went downhill from there.

I came from having heaps of friends and family to no friends, people teasing me ... so it was a huge culture shock. I didn't know it at the time, but I was becoming depressive. My family just thought I had an attitude, so they'd tell me off. They were also very controlling about what I wore and how I looked, so I became a very angry teenager, to the point where I ended up cutting myself. I went to Elanora State High School to halfway through Year 12, then became quite sick mentally. In 2006, I went back to Elanora to repeat Year 12, but had a huge argument with my mother (Kim), moved out and quit high school.

The next few years were a mix of sleeping on couches and staying with different people. When I was 21, it got to the point where I could not

handle all the negativity and bad stuff around me and had a breakdown. I ended up in hospital in the Robina mental health unit. Later I was referred to (National Youth Mental Health Foundation) headspace on the Gold Coast, which is similar to Brisbane Youth Service (BYS), and that was the start of my recovery. My psychologist taught me that I could never change the people around me, I could only ever change myself. I'd get so mad at him because he wouldn't let me vent, but he did it deliberately so I would take ownership of myself and my actions.

About the time of the Brisbane floods in 2011, I called the homeless helpline and came to Brisbane. I ended up at a shelter and hooked up with BYS through the people at the shelter ... BYS was like a family, they would listen to you and let you feel what you wanted to feel.

Richard at BYS offered me a chance to tell my story at their AGM and it snowballed from there. So I was volunteering with BYS, just speaking at different events and things – it was me just trying to find a way to give back – and that's when I met James. He gave me the job at DA'Burger. James and Wendy are the best people to work with and I love the fact that the restaurant goes out of its way to help young people who are in the same situation I was in.

At the time, I was staying at a boarding house and got help finding a place to live through (not-for-profit housing provider) Brisbane Housing Company and Second Chance, which is a program for women, aged 25-30, that helps with rent to help them get back on their feet.

I moved into my unit at Spring Hill last year and I love it. I'm still learning how to work through a lot of stuff and overcome all the unhealthy habits I had growing up, but I can acknowledge now that Mum did the best she could due to her own unhealthy upbringing and she cares about me in her own unique way. I'm making my house my sanctuary and continuing to learn and improve my mental health.

Brisbane Youth Service (www.brisyouth.org), Brisbane Housing Company (bhc.com.au) and Second Chance (secondchanceprogramme.com.au)